



HABIT STACKING

Deeper essays
on personal
growth,
productivity
and happiness

THOMAS OPPONG

Habit Stacking

A collection of essays on personal growth, productivity and happiness

Thomas Oppong

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Other books by Thomas Oppong

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Introduction

I am fascinated with personal growth. I believe life can be consistently improved if we keep focusing on what works. We owe it to ourselves to maximise our full potential. Confucius once said, “Men’s natures are alike; it is their habits that separate them.” We are what we repeatedly do. And those actions are either helping you achieve everything you want in life or holding you back.

To grow, we must improve. Life is a constant striving for improvement. But it doesn't have to be a difficult process you dread. Otherwise you won't make it a habit. Which is why I believe in small consistent steps. I've said it before, but this is a very important step here: the best way to change is through small increments. One small step at a time. Don't try to bite off too much. It's taking things one little goal at a time, a bit at a time that makes all the difference. Want to sleep better? Start exercising? Start journaling? Or start eating healthy? Focus on one small work task at a time. Small steps, taken one at a time, with as much presence as you can muster. And they make all the difference in the world. You can take action in the right direction: changing fundamental health and productivity habits, putting our creativity out there in the world, and taking steps to finally work on that project you've been wanting to start by focusing on marginal gains. Personal development doesn't happen overnight. You can't change your entire life with a single action. It happens slowly and deliberately. Consistency is what creates truly meaningful change — and this is what makes the process so difficult for people. Personal development is a daily practice and lifestyle. These selected essays are some of my best pieces online. Use them to make that change you expect in your life and career. And Enjoy the hell out of it.

Happy reading!

Happiness is Being Responsible For Your Own Experience

“Happiness is an inside job. Don’t assign anyone else that much power over your life, ” said Mandy Hale. Many people wait for something to happen or someone to make them happy. You are responsible for your own life experiences. Whether you are seeking a meaningful life or happy life. If you expect others to make you happy, you will always be disappointed. Being responsible means not blaming others for your unhappiness. It means figuring out ways to be happy despite others’ (negative) behaviours and despite the external influences.

The all-important truth about happiness is this: your happiness depends much more on your attitude than it does on objectives, or external circumstances. In many cases of unhappiness, people experience difficult circumstances that create paradigm shifts, whole new frames of reference by which they see the world and themselves and others in it, and what life is asking of them.

When you are caught in the stress of life, you can easily forget your responsibility and how you should react to stay happy, comfortable and calm. You will stop to notice what is awesome and magical in life. No one can make you happy, nor can you make anyone else happy. Instead of looking to get happy from a person or a job, or an external factor, view relationships and/or work as outlets for happiness, and focus on how you can give more happiness.

When you leave your happiness in someone else’s hands, you’ll end up being dependent on them and when they leave you, you’ll become empty inside. Everything outside yourself can help you get better in life, but they are not the means to your happiness.

Viktor Frankl, author of the best-selling book, *Man's Search for Meaning* says two of the most important values in life are the experiential, or that which happens to us and attitudinal, or our response in difficult situations. "The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance," he says. Don't be easily discouraged by unfavourable circumstances.

Happiness is a choice. You have the ability to control your own emotions. Do not let anything or anyone rob you from your own happiness. Drop the negative people and dramas in your life. Choose to do more activities that'll bring you joy for as long they are not detrimental to your body and soul.

Happiness is acceptance

"The happiest people in the world are those who feel absolutely terrific about themselves, and this is the natural outgrowth of accepting total responsibility for every part of their life, " says Brian Tracy.

Accept you for who you are. Accept that there are things that are beyond your control. Accept the things you cannot change. Stop comparing yourself to others all the time. "Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today". Jordan Peterson said that.

It's rule number 4 of his best-selling book, *12 Rules For Life*. Channel your brain to make a better comparison in your long-term interest, growth, and happiness. Change the object of comparison to yourself. If the urge to compare is too strong to ignore, measure yourself against yourself. Once you truly understand how to let go of your comparison mindset, you will see the world from an entirely different perspective.

The dangers of pinning our happiness/progress with how we measure up to others are too great to ignore. The more you desperately want to be like someone else, the more unworthy you feel. The more you desperately want to be happier, the lonelier you become, despite the awesome people surrounding you. The key to the good life you really need is giving a damn about what's important to your growth, career and total well being. Chances are you are paying too much attention to negative information.

When you start aiming at something different — something like “I want to be better than I was yesterday ” — your minds will start presenting you with new information, derived from your previously hidden self, to aid you in your new pursuit and quest to become a better version of yourself.

Happiness is being grateful

“Happiness depends upon ourselves.” — Aristotle

What is the one unique thing you are grateful for today? Practice writing everything you are grateful for every now and then. Don't write the same things every day. Selecting unique areas of gratitude each day forces you to re-frame your perspective to look for the positive, rather than the negative, aspects in your daily life. Gratitude has been linked to a host of physical and psychological benefits, including happiness. One study found that grateful people are 25 percent happier.

So whether you make it a habit to talk about what you're grateful for, or you write in a gratitude journal before bed, train your brain to look for the good in your life. It could be the simplest, most effective way to boost your well-being. Charles Dickens puts this well: “Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has many, not your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.”

Happiness isn't a destination, it's a habit

“Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking.” — Marcus Aurelius

It's what we do to make everything else in life awesome. And once we make that internal shift, we can put our day-to-day external frustrations into perspective. Our brains are wired to be negative, but the good news is that you can train your brain to hold on to happiness. As we understand better how the brain works, it gives us more power to change our mind in so many ways, says Rick Hanson, a neuropsychologist and author of the book *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*. All mental activities — sights, sounds, thoughts, emotions, and both conscious and unconscious processes — are the result of firing neurons.

Intense, prolonged, or repeated neural activity leaves an enduring imprint through which future neurons are likely to flow. Like a river shapes land, the more we think and feel a certain way, the deeper the river channel becomes and the more likely we are to think and feel the same way in the future. You can train your brain to scan for the good things in life — to help you see more possibilities, to feel more energy, and to succeed at higher levels.

According to Shawn Achor, psychologist, Harvard researcher, and author of *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology That Fuel Success and Performance at Work*, when you raise the positivity levels in your brain, you actually do better work and, generally, are happier.

Key takeaway. When your happiness is in the hands of other people, they determine when you can be happy. Free yourself today and be responsible for your happiness. The next time you want to look for happiness, take a look at yourself in the mirror. That

reflection is the one who is responsible for your happiness. Starting today, exercise your brain for happiness every day, and over time, you'll train it for happiness and a better life. As you increasingly install experiences of acceptance, gratitude, accomplishment, and feeling that there's a fullness in your life rather than an emptiness or a scarcity, you will be able to deal with the issues of life better.

Irresistibly Irrational (We Are Not As Rational As We Think)

If you think your choices are based on logic and reason, think again. Humans are irrational creatures. Cognitive scientists have known for decades that we are inherently irrational. Dan Ariely explains in his best-selling book, *Predictably Irrational*: "We all want explanations for why we behave as we do and for the ways the world around us functions. Even when our feeble explanations have little to do with reality. We're storytelling creatures by nature, and we tell ourselves story after story until we come up with an explanation that we like and that sounds reasonable enough to believe. And when the story portrays us in a more glowing and positive light, so much the better."

Humans are inherently emotional, so our biases and beliefs can blur our perception of reality. "Our thinking is riddled with systematic mistakes known to psychologists as cognitive biases. And they affect everything we do. They make us spend impulsively, be overly influenced by what other people think. They affect our beliefs, our opinions, and our decisions, and we have no idea it is happening," says Toby Macdonald of the BBC.

We rarely make decisions based on facts. Rational decisions are those based on solid statistics and objective facts. Rationality trains you to notice your beliefs, many of which you may not even be consciously aware of, and ask yourself: where did those beliefs come from, and do I have good reason to think they're accurate? How would I know if they're false? Have I considered any other, alternative hypotheses?

Rationality shows you how to evaluate advice, assumptions, and principles.

A rational person's behaviour is guided more by conscious reasoning than by experience, and not adversely affected by emotions. When you are rational, you are likely to change your mind when presented with new and factual evidence that challenges your existing beliefs. Rationalists are interested in getting the right answer rather than in defending their own egos.

Rationality trains you to step back from your emotions so that they don't cloud your judgment. Rationality breaks your habit of automatically trusting your instinctive, emotional judgments, encouraging you instead to notice the beliefs underlying your emotions and ask yourself whether those beliefs are justified.

Unfortunately, most people are not rational. Many of us make bad decisions in systematic ways. Nobody wants to make a bad decision, but we still all make bad decisions. Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and other psychologists have demonstrated that humans are systematically, and deeply irrational in their reasoning and decision making. They have shown that we make choices that defy logic.

"Our inability to understand ourselves in a different emotional state does not seem to improve with experience; when that happens, when our irrational self comes alive in an emotional place that we think is familiar but in fact, is unfamiliar?" writes Dan Ariely.

Example, many people are willing to work for free, but once money is mentioned, they immediately revert back to market norms and demand what they are worth. Most people don't mind adding an extra \$100 to a \$5,000, but they will clip coupons to save even \$1 dollar when buying something else. They consider the value amounts relatively rather than objectively. Why is that?

When presented with a choice between two products: one free and the other at a cost, studies show that people irrationally opt for the free one, even if it means greater expenses in the long-term. And why do we always take what's free, even if we don't really want what's on offer? When we are overly excited by free, we make mistakes.

Zero is not just a mere discount; it is a powerful decision-making factor.

And why does taking a cash gift from a friend make us feel uncomfortable, while a gift card is perfectly acceptable? When making a choice between three options (1, 2, and 3), you are most likely to value them differently if you had to choose between just 1 and 2. Economists say this is faulty thinking because the value of 1 and the value of 2 are not altered by the presence of 3. In many situations, our thinking process changes and our decisions vary depending on how options are presented to us.

Most people don't know what they want unless they see it in context.

We don't know what kind of phone we want — until we see a review. We don't know what kind of speaker we like — until we hear a set of speakers that sounds better than the previous one. We don't even know what we want to do with our lives — until we find an influencer who is doing just what we think we should be doing.

Behavioural economists argue that human judgment is notoriously flawed in many ways and that we could achieve much better outcomes if we understood our flawed thinking for what it is. Professor Richard Thaler, one of the longtime leaders of this school of behavioural economics and his colleagues have pointed out all sorts of flaws in human judgment. In his book, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, Thaler writes: "Hundreds of studies confirm that human forecasts are flawed and biased. Human decision making is not so great either. Again to take just one

example, consider what is called the “status quo bias,” a fancy name for inertia. For a host of reasons, which we shall explore, people have a strong tendency to go along with the status quo or default option.”

The good news is, you can train yourself to question your repeated behaviours and make better decisions. Pay particular attention to your first decision. Question your assumptions, and decision making factors. Short-term decisions can influence long-term decisions. Every decision can have large consequences on the next one. First decision can have such a long-lasting effect. Given this effect, the first decision is crucial, and we should give it an appropriate amount of attention. Making a rational decision involves an analysis of the inputs (information, assumptions, and biases) that form part of your reasoning. If you take your inputs seriously, the output (decisions) that result from your reasoning will improve. Making a rational decision means questioning continuously. It is drilling down to eliminate inaccuracies, wrong assumptions, improve comprehension, and strive for intellectually honest results.

Seek first to understand

Most people don't think their decisions are flawed but they are quick to observe irrational behaviour in others. They think they are being rational in the moment. In reality, nothing we think about or do fails to be influenced by a multitude of mental shortcuts that our brain has gathered through experience to allow us to get through the day. In his book, *You Are Not So Smart*, David McRaney, explains, “You are a confabulatory creature by nature. You are always explaining to yourself the motivations for your actions and the causes to the effects in your life, and you make them up without realizing it when you don't know the answers. Over time, these explanations become your idea of who you are and your place in the world. They are yourself... You are a story you tell yourself.”

You have to be aware of your biases and create systems that mitigate the damage, otherwise, you will never come close to making rational choices. When you know the underlying principles, thoughts, and systems for making better decisions, extend them to new situations, and scenarios, discarding the ineffective parts and enhancing the parts that do work. The progress of knowledge is inevitable in any human environment, no matter how long it takes. Sheer intellectual curiosity can help you question your assumptions and make better conclusions.

Stay curious and explore the hidden biases of your own thought processes to make better and informed decisions. And sometimes, the smarter you are, the more likely you are to fall victim to biases because you think you know it all. When in doubt, use precedents. But don't follow what has worked in the past without first seeking to understand.

When something makes sense, it's easy to use rationality to adjust the approach to your own circumstances. "Sometimes we need to take actions where good reasons are either hard to find or fail to account for complexity. In these situations, copying from success can be a better strategy than trying to analyze," says Scott Young.

Beware of intuition. With every decision or judgement you make, there is a battle in your mind — a battle between intuition and logic. And your intuitive brain is a lot more powerful than you may think. According to researchers, emotions rule our decision-making so strongly that unhappy moods can affect stock performance.

"In order to have anything like a complete theory of human rationality, we have to understand what role emotion plays in it," writes Nobel laureate Herbert Simon in his 1983 book *Reason In Human Affairs*. Delay decisions when possible. "Give yourself time to make decisions since research shows that emotions are short-lived and

humans typically go back to “baseline states” after some time,” says Vivian Giang. Anything that gives you new knowledge offers you the opportunity to be more rational. Rationality generally results in better decisions and a better life but it takes practice. You can improve your ability to identify and avoid probably worse scenarios in your decision-making processes.

Why You Feel Busy All The Time (And How to Reclaim Your Time, Attention, And Mental Clarity)

In an era of extreme busyness, the only conceivable way to live a meaningful and a purpose-driven life is to stop doing busy work. Trying to keep up with the overwhelming pace of today’s world keeps us in a constant state of busyness. Busy’ has become the new ‘Fine’. Many people feel like they are “pressed for time.” They feel like there is “not enough time in the day.” Others feel like they are “running out of time.” It’s time-consuming and can be stressful. You simply can’t do it all and respond to everything and everyone.

It pays to prioritize.

Choose your daily actions carefully. Prioritization empowers you to focus on the most important tasks while shelving unimportant work for later. Everything you do with no real purpose is a waste of your precious time. Busy work makes you feel like you are moving quickly and being productive in the process. But in effect, you are not.

If you took the time to measure your work, you will be surprised at how little valuable work you are doing. Oliver Burkeman of BBC writes, “When you’re busy, you’re more likely to make poor time-management choices — taking on commitments you can’t handle, or prioritizing trifling tasks over crucial ones. A vicious spiral kicks in, your

feelings of busyness leave you even busier than before.” Real work advances your goals while busy work is what you do to avoid real work. Many of us confuse being “busy” with being effective, or efficient. If you start your day by answering emails. You could get sucked into answering questions, replying to every email, and advancing the cause of other people’s actions.

Be proactive about your emails. Don’t get caught up in a reactive mode. “Most of us have no problem with being busy, but we’re often busy with the wrong things,” says Angie Morgan, co-author of *Spark: How to Lead Yourself and Others to Greater Success*. “You could spend nine to five just emailing, but that’s not driving results or moving you toward longer, bigger goals. When people say, ‘I’m so busy,’ it really means, ‘I’m a poor planner,’ or, ‘I don’t know how to prioritize or delegate.” Adopt the “one thing” approach. Make the hard choices and work on your most important priorities.

Develop task and time mastery.

You can stop busy work and do your best work every day. But it comes at a cost because you have to change your approach to work entirely: Develop a greater focus. Committing to only doing really important work takes an incredible amount of discipline. Your time is limited. Doing everything is not an option. Doing one thing means not doing something else. And there is a big difference between the things that should be done and the things that must be done.

Resist the temptation to multitask. If you have several items to focus on within the same day, try breaking your work time into short, focused bursts. The Pomodoro method is a popular strategy where you spend 25 minutes working and 5 in between tasks to rest. This way, you’re still focusing on your most important high-value work, but also giving yourself the freedom to jump between different tasks. We live in an “infinite world”, says

Tony Crabbe, author of the book *Busy: How to Thrive in a World of Too Much*. There are always more incoming emails, more meetings, more things to read, more ideas, projects and work to follow up.

The result, inevitably, is feeling overwhelmed: we're each finite human beings, with finite energy and abilities, attempting to get through an infinite amount. We feel a social pressure to "do it all", at work and at home, but that's not just really difficult; it's a mathematical impossibility. To finish what you start, and get real work done, Cal Newport recommends the Daily Check-In method. He writes: "Each morning, look at your project page and ask: "What's the most progress I can make toward completing this list today?" Your biggest goal should be to complete projects. If you see a way to do it (even if it requires a big push, perhaps working late) go for it. If you can't finish one, think of the single thing you could do that would get you closest to this goal over the next few days. Harbor an obsession for killing this list! Aim to make as much progress on your work, as possible despite the other reactive tasks that demand your attention.

Being busy is an excuse to ourselves and others for not doing the important things, the scary things, the difficult things, the hard work that makes the real impact on results. Being effective means being deliberate. You have to choose to pursue high-value work. Low-value work is inevitable.

Schedule time for low-value tasks to measure how much time you spend on them. This seems counterintuitive, but it isn't in practice. When you limit how much time you give yourself to work on urgent but not important tasks, you force yourself to expend more energy over less time so you can get tasks done faster to make time for high-value work.

You have more than enough time, you're just not spending it right. "I don't have enough time." We've all said it before. Time poverty is a distribution issue. Many people hate

being idle. They value productivity, so they glorify being busy. They seek out busyness for the sake of being busy. They sense a feeling that they are time-constrained, yet they are more time-affluent than they think.

For many of us, the key reason we “don’t have enough time” is that we never adequately clarify how much time we should be devoting to the different things we value most. One of the biggest frustrations many of us feel is having too much to do, and not feeling like we have enough time to do it. We are overwhelmed. If you keep running out of time, it’s typically because you are spreading yourself too thin.

Sometimes part of the conflict is not having a clear idea of what you should be doing first thing in the morning, or what could be postponed until midday. This can make you feel like you’re being pulled in a different direction. Leo Babauta, author of *Zen To Done: The Ultimate Simple Productivity System*, explains, “By picking your tasks carefully, you’re taking care with the container of your time. You can pick important tasks or joyful ones, but you’re being conscious about the choices. You’re treating it like the precious gift that it is: limited, valuable, to be filled with the best things, and not overstuffed.”

If you systematically set priorities for your week, or day, there will be enough time for your high-value work. Prioritization and organizing can lead to a more efficient allocation of time. Step back and figure out what is important to you. Get rid of the unimportant, de-commit, brainstorm long or short-term changes. You have all the time you need to create value, work on your best work and make an impact. Time is an asset. It’s a huge aspect of work you probably take for granted.

Are you wasting, spending, or investing your time? Stewart Stafford once said, “The quickest way to run out of time is to think you have enough of it.” You waste time when

you focus on low-value work. You invest time when you choose to use it for activities that contribute to your long-term growth.

“Time is the most valuable coin in your life. You and you alone will determine how that coin will be spent. Be careful that you do not let other people spend it for you,” says Carl Sandburg. When people see their time in terms of money, they often grow stingy with the former to maximise the latter. Start distributing your time right. Start by reviewing your daily routine. Track your daily activities for some time to clearly see where your time is being spent. Meetings, phone calls, emails, notifications, small chats, and many other distractions are constantly splitting your attention. Record ALL your appointments, deadlines, and everything in-between. Analyse the actual time you spend on each activity with what you think is the best amount for each.

Schedule the heck out of your days. Schedule everything in advance. Make a plan and know what’s going on each day. This helps you figure out how you’re spending your time. Notice where time leaks, then declutter your routine. Revisit your schedule regularly. Check in with yourself weekly to see if your schedule reflects what you want it to.

The key takeaway is this: Lean to avoid the busy work that adds no real value to your work, vision or long-term goal. The more deliberate you are about how you spend your time and energy, the less likely you will get bogged down in trivial tasks that make you feel like you are pressed for time all the time. It’s okay to be happy with a calm life.

Evening Habits That Will Prepare You For a Better Tomorrow

I am a big fan of routines, systems, and principles. There’s something about order and structure that make everything better. It’s comforting, and calming knowing how your

day will begin and end. When your day is structured to get your best work done, you begin every workday with a sense of clarity, purpose, and satisfaction.

Darren Hardy, editor-in-chief of Success Magazine and author of *The Compound Effect* argues that a person's morning and evening routines are the "bookends" of a successful life. When you build better morning and evening routines, you prepare your brain to be better equipped to face the varying challenges each day brings. If you swear by morning routines, you could get even more out of your day by creating an evening routine.

Building routines aren't easy. It takes self-discipline, and practice to make it work. But the good news is that once you've practised a routine for a good number of days it gets harder not to do them. Stick with it, and your life will never be the same. Evening routines can set you up for a better day tomorrow.

Here is a familiar routine you should give up: After work, you eat dinner, sprawl out on the couch, binge Netflix, you keep using your smartphone until you practically fall asleep, struggle to get a good night sleep, wake up tired or late, and start your day without knowing exactly what needs to be done. Long before the week is over, you're burned out and know you won't hit this week's goals.

How do you get out of this rut? Better morning and evening routines! A routine at night means better time management. "Maintaining healthy habits is a good idea at any time of the day, but certain ones can give you more bang for your buck when done before bed," says Rachel Daniels, RD, senior director of nutrition at Virtual Health Partners in New York. In his book *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work*, Mason Currey writes about the habits, routines, and rituals of hundreds of artists, including Benjamin Franklin, Karl Marx, Charles Dickens, Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemingway. Their daily rituals varied wildly, but routines put them in an optimal state of mind to do their best work every day.

Currey came to this conclusion, after studying their habits. In the right hands, [a routine] can be a finely calibrated mechanism for taking advantage of a range of limited resources: time (the most limited resource of all) as well as willpower, self-discipline, optimism. A solid routine fosters a well-worn groove for one's mental energies and helps stave off the tyranny of moods. The close of each day is just as important as the start. Use these habits to get ready for tomorrow and minimise the resistance you encounter in getting things done every day.

1. Get ready for tomorrow today

This is one of the most important things you can do before tomorrow morning. Planning for tomorrow changes everything. Spend your last 20 minutes every day to reflect, process, and prioritise for the next day. End your day on purpose. At home, most people get their work clothes ready, exercise gear out and ready for morning exercise, and get all the relevant documents that they need to use for the next day ready before they sleep. To prepare better, you could write down how you want to spend your morning. If you do this, you will wake up and know exactly what you need to do to make your day a success.

You will become more effective and more productive because you're ready and everything is within your reach. Conversely, if you're not ready for the next day, imagine what can go wrong. You wake up late, can't decide your clothes, you forget where you put your important documents for the meeting, etc. Your day will be in a mess. So always plan your morning the night before.

2. Create a shutdown ritual

Our lives are incessantly bombarded and interrupted by emails, texts and phone calls — much of it is unnecessary — keeping us plugged in and unable to relax even when we are not working. You gotta get your brain out of “work mode” to have a better

and relaxing evening. It's easy to take your work back home or even to bed, making it difficult to fall asleep as you think over job-related problems. Give yourself a buffer period between the time you read your last email at work and the time you go to bed.

Plan your evenings to help you clear your head. It will help you go to bed feeling less stressed and allow you to sleep better, with a clearer mind. The idea is to get your head out of work before you lie down to go to sleep. Michael Woodward, Ph.D., organisational psychologist and author of "*The YOU Plan*," agrees. "The last thing you need is to be lying in bed thinking about an email you just read from that overzealous boss who spends all their waking hours coming up with random requests driven by little more than a momentary impulse." Create a ritual so you can detach from work the minute you get home. As soon as you step through the front door, start the after-work ritual that will help put more mental distance between you and your workday.

Time with family, a simple exercise, spending time on your passion project, watching your favourite show, and reading things you could consider. It could be anything that relaxes you and that is replicable each day. Truly successful people do anything but work right before bed. They don't obsessively check their email, and they try not to dwell on work-related issues. In his book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about what Motivates Us*, bestselling author Daniel Pink suggests creating a ritual at the end of the day to help you gain control of your evening. "Establish a closing ritual. Know when to stop working. Try to end each work day the same way, too. Straighten up your desk. Backup your computer. Make a list of what you need to do tomorrow."

Create your 'shutdown ritual' today to disconnect from the workday tonight. By creating your own ritual, one that focuses on control and positivity, you're essentially rewriting every day with a happy ending. Creating a relaxing ritual tells the brain that the working day is over.

3. Establish a restorative place to unwind

If you look at a screen all day, you need physiological and psychological resources to help you wind down. If you are mentally tired, sitting down and watching television all night is probably the least effective way to unwind. Find somewhere you feel comfortable, happy and relaxed — and spend 20 minutes there just to focus on calming yourself. It could be a place to do absolutely nothing. But it doesn't necessarily have to be a place of solitude.

“The point is it is your space to settle inner tension, allowing for the renewal of one's coping resources, contemplation and buying time to gather thoughts,” says Prof. Mark Cropley, a leading psychologist at the University of Surrey specialising in health and stress. The most important thing to remember is to create a relaxing ritual that tells the brain that work is over. “Getting changed and having a shower as soon as you arrive home signals to the brain that you have finished for the day, as can short household chores — so long as you don't usually see them as work,” says Prof Cropley.

4. Make time to reflect

“At the end of each day, you should play back the tapes of your performance. The results should either applaud you or prod you.” — Jim Rohn

Benjamin Franklin famously asked himself the same self-improvement question every night: “What good have I done today?” Reflection is a simple practice that can put things in perspective for you. That can take no more than 5 minutes a day but can have a tremendous effect on your day tomorrow. Remember to take some time to reflect on the positive moments of the day (whilst you ponder over what can be improved) and celebrate the successes, even if they were few and far between.

Laura Vanderkam, author of *"I Know How She Does It"* and *"What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast,"* adds: "Taking a few moments to think about what went right over the course of the day can put you in a positive, grateful mood." Research shows writing down what you need to do the next day relieves anxiety and helps you enjoy your evening.

These are a few questions you can focus on for a purposeful evening of reflection: What you did and didn't get done? How do you feel about it? If you could have done it in less time and how would you approach it? What were the things you did that weren't important or even necessary but felt urgent? What would you change to be more productive tomorrow?

5. Focus on mastery experiences

The time after work is yours to manage. Some people spend time on their passion projects and work towards their dream career or vision. Or better still, you can focus on personal development. Do you want to learn a new skill or language? It's the opportune time you can leverage to master a new experience.

Or you could improve stuff you're good at and try to get better. Actively engage in a hobby, don't passively sit on the couch. The daily grind can easily overshadow passion projects like writing a book, starting a blog, learning a new language, starting an online business, creating art, learning an instrument, designing, learning to code, collecting and selling vintage objects etc. Extracurricular outlets don't just boost your sanity — they feed back into your day job and can actually make you more productive. Using 30 minutes or less of your evening to pursue something meaningful to you will immensely improve not only your total well being but a sense of self-worth. Make time for something you have a natural interest in.

6. Read something you enjoy

Experts agree that reading is the very last thing most successful people do before going to sleep — US President Barack Obama and Bill Gates are known to read for at least a half hour before bed. Reading is a great de-stressor. It's the perfect kind of evening ritual: it forces you to lie down and cut out the distractions. Choose books you enjoy. It can be whatever you want — inspiration, fiction or anything — but find some time to read and grow and put your mind in a state of learning. When you go to sleep, your brain is going to consolidate what you just read, which is pretty nice. If you prefer to read in bed, choose paper books. They will calm your brain and help you transition into sleep quicker. The potential disadvantage of a digital reader is the amount and type of light coming from screens which can be disruptive to your sleep.

7. Cut out the blue light!

Blue light from tablets, laptops and smartphones interferes with falling asleep because it suppresses melatonin, an essential hormone for sleep. Devices can be very stimulating and stimulation is the last thing you need when trying to fall asleep at night.

If you are going to have your computer open, in an emergency situation, try using the f.lux software. It tracks the cycle of the sun in your time zone and latitude and then adjusts your gadget's levels of blue light to match. Or, you could dim your device. A recent Mayo Clinic study found that dimming the brightness to about 50% keeps blue light low enough to not interfere with sleep. But, digital gadgets aren't the only culprits; to avoid blue light from your lamps, switch to bulbs that have a low colour temperature. Richard Wiseman, professor of psychology at the University of Hertfordshire and bestselling author of *Night School: Wake up to The Power of Sleep*, adds: "Ten minutes of a smartphone in front of your nose is about the equivalent of an hour long walk in bright daylight. Imagine going for an hour-long walk in bright daylight and then thinking,

“Now I’ll get some sleep.” It ain’t going to happen.” So no screens, at least an hour before bed.

8. And prioritise sleep!

It can be easy to minimize the importance of sleep, but it’s absolutely essential for optimum performance. Good sleep on a regular basis is critical to maintaining balanced mental, emotional, and physical health. Stick to the same sleep and wake schedule. Remove clutter and items that remind you of work from your bedroom.

Elastic Thinking Habits

“Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” George Bernard Shaw said that. And Einstein also said, “The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.” Life is neither static nor unchanging, it’s fluid. Nothing stays the same. Elastic thinking (experts may call it cognitive flexibility) allows us to shift gears and think about something in more than one way. Flexible thinkers consider a range of different possible consequences of their actions rather than only considering an optimistic view or only considering a pessimistic view. A fixed mindset can sabotage your efforts to thrive in a changing environment. Being flexible doesn’t always mean having to give in, or say yes. What it means is you are looking at things from a different perspective first, and then making a choice that is best, this is flexibility.

How elastic is your brain?

The ability to stretch beyond your core strengths when necessary and quickly rebound back to your core skills and discipline is a desirable trait. Elasticity is essentially responsiveness to change in an ever-changing world. To survive in an environment of constant stimulation and rapid change, elastic thinking is essential.

Elasticity is flexibility. It's the ability to adapt to new situations, break down complex tasks into bite-size chunks, improvise, and shift strategies to meet different types of challenges. Flexibility gives the human brain the edge over computers is flexible thinking. Elastic minds are people who reimagine new ways to solve existing problems and create tools to make things better, easier, faster and smarter. They can better balance long term and short term desires. When they're in any situation, they can think about both long term and short term goals to make better decisions.

The best innovators can quickly shift their perspective. "Our new role as visionaries, decision makers, and strategic informants means we can't rely on any rules. There are more stakeholders, more complicated products, and faster market cycles. In this environment, elasticity is more important than ever" explains Stuart Karten, the Founder and President of Los Angeles-based product innovation consultancy. To thrive now and in the future, you have to be willing to rise above conventional mindsets and wisdom.

You become indispensable in the world by constantly outgrowing your existing roles. The questions you asked today may not unravel the answers you seek tomorrow. To stay competitive in life and business, you have to be open to new paradigms. You have to rely as much on your imagination as on logic. Elastic thinking is about stretching your mind and using 'bottom up' processing in the brain rather than the top down executive functions that drive analytical thinking. It encompasses a range of processes including, but not confined to, neophilia (an enthusiasm for novelty), schizotypy, imagination, idea generation and divergent thinking," explains Dhruti Shah of BBC Capital.

Elastic thinking, in combination with rational or logical thought, and creative thinking will make you indispensable. Elastic thinking endows us with the ability to solve novel problems and overcome the neural barriers that can impede us from looking beyond the status quo. Solving problems and drawing better conclusions requires a blend of logical,

analytical and elastic thinking. “Logical analytical thinking is really good when you are trying to solve a problem you’ve seen before. You can use known methods and techniques to approach whatever issue you are dealing with. Elastic thinking is what you need when the circumstances change and you are dealing with something new. It’s not about following rules,” says Leonard Mlodinow, theoretical physicist, author of *“Elastic: Flexible Thinking in a Time of Change.”*

John F. Kennedy once said, “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” Flexible thinking means stretching what you know enough to make an educated guess that could be right (and if it’s not, that’s okay).

The elastic mind of Leonardo

“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day,” says Einstein. Leonardo da Vinci maintained a passionate curiosity throughout life. He simply wanted to know. He was an elastic thinker and a prolific creator. His mind wandered merrily across the arts, sciences, engineering, and humanities. More than 7,000 pages of Leonardo’s notebooks still exist. His genius came from being wildly imaginative, quirkily curious and willfully observant. His novelty was a product of his own will and effort, which makes his story inspiring for us and also more possible to emulate. Da Vinci’s work paved the path for artists, scientists, and philosophers alike. Most of the people we admire often have the gift of the elastic mind.

Today, more than ever, we must embrace the elastic mindset. In a stable world devoid of change, we can solve problems by applying the same old techniques, principles, and

rules. But the age of unprecedented technological change constantly challenges us to find new solutions. Do you give in when faced with a problem you have not seen before, or are you driven by the determination to achieve?

How strongly are you driven to reach that “light” at the end of the tunnel? Solving problems and drawing better conclusions within an existing framework requires a blend of analytical and elastic thinking. In the right combination with other traits, elastic thinking is a crucial predictor of total well-being. “Novelty-seeking is one of the traits that keeps you healthy and happy and fosters personality growth as you age,” says C. Robert Cloninger, a psychiatrist.

How to develop an agile mind

The good news is flexible thinking skills can be taught. For those wishing to tap into elastic thinking, Mlodinow suggests carving out time for daydreaming, talking to people outside your social circle, absorbing great art out of your comfort zone, listening to ideas or concepts you actively disagree with before disregarding them. Always try to look at everything from more than one angle. Change the context or your environment and you’ll feel your mind shift. Take a walk. Take a coffee break. Exercise offers another great mental boost. The more you can challenge yourself to be spontaneous and allow for some new experiences, the easier it will be to integrate flexibility into your everyday life! Mental flexibility is aided by novelty, and that contributes to brain growth and development throughout a lifetime.

The next time you encounter the stress of change, remember that you can adapt to thrive and become indispensable in the ever-changing world. Remember, flexibility is a choice and with practice, you will be making moves you never thought possible.

How to Get More Work Done in a Single Day Than Most People Do in a Week

“Time is what we want most, but what we spend worst.” William Penn said that. It’s profound and very true. Time is more valuable than money. You can always get more money, but you can never get more time. But surprisingly we spend our precious time doing everything that adds little or no value to our lives. Warren Buffett and Bill Gates have both said that, to get your best work done, you have to say no to almost everything. In his essay, ‘On the Shortness of Life’, the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca reminds us that if we waste our life, nature will not give us any warnings or signals. Instead, life will “silently glide away”: It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death’s final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it... Life is long if you know how to use it.

There are lots of ways to slice your working hours every day. 8 hours is a lot of time you may be spending on too many things that have little or no value to your long-term goal. 2 hours in a meeting you didn’t even need in the first place, 30 minutes on your favourite social network site just scrolling without end, reacting or responding to urgent emails that have no impact on the bigger picture, and the constant notification that distracts you from getting real work done.

This is how you end up thinking “What did I do today?” when the clock turns to five and you supposedly spent eight hours at the office. You know you were there, but the hours had no weight, so they slipped away with nothing to show for it. A fractured 8 hours isn’t

really how you should spend your time— don't make your work day a mess of minutes. Look at your hours. If they're a bunch of fractions, who or what is doing the division? Are others distracting you or are you distracting yourself? What can you change? How many things are you working on in a given hour?

One thing at a time doesn't mean one thing, then another, then another thing in quick succession. It means an insane focus on the one thing you have to do to advance your work and career goals.

When was the last time you had three or even four completely uninterrupted hours to yourself and your work?" 8 hours a day is plenty of time to do great work, plenty of time to focus on important tasks, plenty of time to get real work done. Most of what we think we have to do, we don't have to do at all. It's a choice, and often it's a poor one. When you cut out what's unnecessary, you're left with what you need. And all you need is 8 hours a day for about 5 days a week. Almost everything can wait if you can commit to it or defend your time like your future depends on it.

Have you looked at your own calendar lately?

"The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything, " says Warren Buffet. How many things did you put there? How many things did other people put there? When someone takes your time, it doesn't cost them anything, but it costs you everything.

Practice the right to decline. Before you say yes and commit to everything you don't have to do, remember you have the right to say no and defend your schedule. "Choice" is a privilege and to harness choice empowers you. You have the freedom to choose and the freedom to change your mind. In terms of productivity, how you deal with this choice dictates whether or not you waste your time and the time of another person or people. Saying no means you have time to focus on your own creation, tasks and

projects, rather than responding and reacting to requests. In the words of Paulo Coelho, “When you say YES to others, make sure you are not saying NO to yourself.”

How is how Charles Dickens rejected an invitation from a friend: “‘It is only half an hour’ — ‘It is only an afternoon’ — ‘It is only an evening,’ people say to me over and over again; but they don’t know that it is impossible to command one’s self sometimes to any stipulated and set disposal of five minutes — or that the mere consciousness of an engagement will sometime worry a whole day ... Whoever is devoted to an art must be content to deliver himself wholly up to it, and to find his recompense in it. I am grieved if you suspect me of not wanting to see you, but I can’t help it; I must go in my way whether or not.” It pays to take control of your time and distribute it right. And don’t give too many damns about what people will think when you start saying no to their demands on your time. Once you learn how to say no, you will pay attention to what’s important and not necessarily urgent.

Are you wasting, spending, or investing your time?

Start by reviewing your daily routine today. It’s important to look at everything you do on a regular basis and ask yourself if that really makes your life better? Track your daily activities for some time to clearly see where your time is being spent. Meetings, phone calls, emails, notifications, small chats, and many other distractions are constantly splitting your attention. Record ALL your appointments, deadlines, and everything in-between. Analyse the actual time you spend on each activity with what you think is the best amount for each.

Schedule the heck out of your days. Schedule everything in advance. Make a plan and know what’s going on each day. This helps you figure out how you’re spending your time. Notice where time leaks, then declutter your routine. Revisit your schedule regularly. Check in with yourself weekly to see if your schedule reflects what you want it to. You can only do great work if you have adequate quality time to do it. If you don’t

own the vast majority of your own time, it's impossible to achieve your goals. Cut back on everything that brings little or no value to your life. The easiest way to get back huge chunks of time is to eliminate pointless activities from your life. Limit the time you spend on the internet and smartphones. Review and reduce your commitments. Question all your obligations. Start owning your time and create room in your life. Some breathing space. Some time for what's most important — your important work, and the things that you love. Your time is your most valuable resource, even more so than money. You cannot get more time. Don't let others waste or steal it. Start defending it today.

21st Century Career Skills

The evolution of skills is accelerating, fast. We live in a world of constant change, where skill sets can become obsolete in just a few years, you have to consistently upgrade and reinvent yourself. "Skill is the unified force of experience, intellect and passion in their operation." John Ruskin could not have defined skill any better. When you strive to consistently improve your skills, you enjoy more success in life and at work.

Don't give up on lifelong learning. Ever. Research shows that it pays beyond the skills you acquire. More than ever before, a challenged, stimulated brain may well be the key to a vibrant later life. "Every skill you acquire doubles your odds of success," says Scott Adams. Start spending time preparing for the future even when there are more important things to do in the present and even when there is no immediately apparent return to your efforts. Begin to plant seeds every day that will yield the best and most fulfilling life now and in the future. These valuable skills can radically improve your life. They may not seem earth shattering at first glance, but you'll be surprised at just how much they can affect your life and career now and for the rest of your productive life.

Get gritty. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest despite failure, adversity, boredom, and plateaus in progress. Daniel Coyle,

author of *The Little Book of Talent* explains, “GRIT is that mix of passion, perseverance, and self-discipline that keeps us moving forward in spite of obstacles.” The only person that can really push you a little bit further in life is yourself.

Grit is both a trait and a skill. And the good news is, you can cultivate or better still grow your grit to strive for what means a lot to you. It’s a skill that can be learned and practiced over time. According to psychologist Angela Duckworth, author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, the personal quality she calls “grit” is more important than talent or intelligence in predicting success. Grit is associated with perseverance, resilience, ambition, and the need for achievement. It involves maintaining goal focused effort for extended periods of time.

You can develop your capacity for grit. Your response to a challenging situation is more important than the obstacle you face. Ryan Holiday says “obstacle is the way”. And you need grit to push through the obstacle every time you face a challenge. The ability to stick with and pursue a goal over a long period is an important indicator of achieving anything worthwhile in life. Grit is a better indicator of success than talent. No matter how talented you think you are, if you don’t put in the work, it will amount to nothing.

The need for adaptability has never been greater than it is now. The world of work is changing at an ever increasing pace. In *Adaptability: “The Art of Winning in an Age of Uncertainty”* Max McKeown argues that, “All failure is failure to adapt, all success is successful adaptation.” We live in an ever-changing world which is unlikely to ever slow down. So, what mattered yesterday (e.g. skill, knowledge, social circle, etc.) very much so might not be worth a dime tomorrow. The ability to change (or be changed) to fit new circumstances — is a crucial skill to master. Leon C. Megginson once observed, “It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change.”

Change used to be slow and incremental: now it is rapid, radical and unpredictable. Charles Darwin said, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

Adaptability enables us to dwell on new circumstances and stay on top of the situation. Of course, this skill is best when combined with insight, giving us fresh perspective before the change itself. Growth depends on how adaptable you are. To stay relevant, most companies will need people who can change with time.

Master failure to succeed better. Sounds strange, right? Everyone is always looking for a new way to succeed, the fastest route to success, the best study methods, “How do I get better at [x] without doing [y]?” The first step is to fail, and not focus on results but learn from the process. Nothing is perfect; nothing will ever be perfect. Everything is a learning process. Those who have mastered failure succeed better. “The evolutionary algorithm — of variation and selection, repeated — searches for solutions in a world where the problems keep changing, trying all sorts of variants and doing more of what works,” says Tim Harford in *Adapt: Why Success Always Starts with Failure*.

Every failure brings you one step closer to success as long as you learn. It’s only a failure when we fail to rise again after a fall. Entrepreneurs know their chances of failing are greater than those of succeeding, but still they try and risk their time and money. If you fail, do it quickly, and more importantly, learn quickly.

How to learn, unlearn and relearn. “The illiterate of the 21st Century are not those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn,” says Alvin Toffler. Learning agility is the name of the game. Unlearning is the new learning. Your ability to proactively make changes in your career is what will make a crucial difference to where you find yourself even just five years from now. To succeed today, you must

be in a constant state of adaptation — continually unlearning old ‘rules’ and relearning new ones. That requires continually questioning assumptions about how things work, challenging old paradigms, and ‘relearning’ what is now relevant in your job, your industry, your career and your life.

People who find opportunities in a changing environment are those who are actively looking for them. Your real education begins with your career, which demands that you continuously learn, irrespective of how often you need to unlearn and relearn.

How to actively and skillfully conceptualize, apply, analyse, synthesise information. The ability to actively and skillfully conceptualize, apply, analyse, synthesise, and/or evaluate information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, is of immense importance to work. Francis Bacon once said, “Critical thinking is a desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order; and hatred for every kind of imposture.”

Decision making and problem solving require gathering reliable information, evaluating the information for a variety of solutions and selecting the most appropriate option based on the criteria and situation. People who can look at problems from a different angle often end up solving them in completely unexpected, often elegant ways. At the same time, they expose how narrowly the majority had viewed the problem, or whether it even was a problem. Creative thinkers are innovative and inventive and are more likely to devise new ways of doing things that add value to the work environment, making systems and procedures more efficient.

The ability to handle yourself, handle others and handle what’s happening around you. In a very practical sense, we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels. Highly emotionally intelligent (EI) people rank high on responsiveness, empathy, listening, and

self-awareness. And they excel at interpersonal interaction. The reason emotional intelligence is so widely valued is pretty simple. It plays a role in everything.

In *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, author Daniel Goleman writes, “People with well-developed emotional skills are also more likely to be content and effective in their lives, mastering the habits of mind that foster their own productivity; people who cannot marshal some control over their emotional life fight inner battles that sabotage their ability for focused work and clear thought.” People skills are so important now and will continue to be in high demand in the future. EI allows us to create relationships with others, provides insights into people’s motives and allows us to predict responses. Any discipline that benefits from the emotional intelligence that only humans can provide will be in high demand. If you are not a people’s person, it’s not too late. You can still learn how to better relate with others. You will need soft skills to thrive in the future.

Personal branding. Being successful in many fields means setting yourself apart. What is the “one thing” you are great at? What’s that one thing that sets you apart? The answer to this question is apt to be elusive. It’s not guaranteed to be simple, either; you might justifiably believe that multiple “things” set you apart, that you have multiple strengths worth constructing a personal brand around. If nothing else, though, this exercise gets you into a branding mindset. As long as you’re thinking in terms of standing apart from your peers and competitors, you’re on the right track.

The impression you project about yourself is crucial for finding the best workplace culture fit and for inspiring confidence in your coworkers, clients, and managers, says Jennifer Lasater, vice president of career services at Purdue University Global. What does your social profiles say about you? If you’re not yet active on relevant social media, now’s the time. Re-tool your top profiles -- — Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and perhaps Instagram,— to align with the personal brand you’ve begun to flesh out. Start

with the basics, such as auditing your social media presence and email name. Ensure that your image comes across as professional and appropriate for the business world. And always remember, a true personal brand is a way of life — you've got to live it every day, lest you lose sight of what makes it unique.

Quick and deep thinking. Information is not the same thing as understanding. What is the quality of your thinking? Thinking is the core of our being. Deeper thinking leads to deeper living. Superficial, shallow thinking produces a superficial life. We are generally not taught how to think. It is a skill we are expected to know, without specific instruction. Are you skilled at analyzing problems?

Here is a challenge for your mind for the rest of the year: commit to dig deeper into subjects of thought or knowledge you deeply care about. When you dig deeper, you understand better. You compare different outcomes. You analyse, dissect and make informed judgement based on different mental models. Read a book once and you will probably have a shallow understanding. Read a book multiple times, take notes, summarize concepts, and guess what, you understand the ideas deeply. A shallow thinker solves one problem with one known solution whilst a deep thinker approaches multiple problems from different angles.

Resourcefulness. Resourcefulness is primarily problem-solving. If you're resourceful, you can take a past system and see how you can make it better. It often requires an imaginative and optimistic outlook. There is an aspect of persistence and mental toughness in it as well, but problem-solving forms the heart of resourcefulness. Most people put their dreams on hold because they're waiting for the right resources to become available to them. They feel stuck and can't get past obstacles. Most businesses today favour employees who understand how to do more with less, solve problems better and help the company to achieve its goals.

Bezos once said that resourcefulness is critical for anyone pursuing a big dream because it's inevitable that we'll run into problems.

"As a lot of entrepreneurs know, the whole point of moving things forward is you run into problems, you run into failures, things don't work. You have to back up and try again. Each one of those times you have a setback and you back up and try again, you're using resourcefulness, you're using self-reliance. You're trying to invent your way out of a box. No matter what you do, take the time to develop more resourcefulness to increase your chances of success and to help make you more self-reliant. When you are resourceful: You are proactive not reactive, you're aware of the possibilities and opportunities around you and know how to make the most of them, you use valuable information to your advantage at the right time.

Elastic mindset. "Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything," George Bernard Shaw said that. And Einstein also said, "The measure of intelligence is the ability to change." Life is neither static nor unchanging, it's fluid. Nothing stays the same. Elastic thinking (experts may call it cognitive flexibility) allows us to shift gears and think about something in more than one way. A fixed mindset can sabotage your efforts to thrive in a changing environment. How elastic is your brain? The ability to stretch beyond your core strengths when necessary and quickly rebound back to your core skills and discipline is a desirable trait. Elasticity is essentially responsiveness to change in an ever-changing world. To survive in an environment of constant stimulation and rapid change, elastic thinking is essential. Elasticity is flexibility. It's the ability to adapt to new situations, break down complex tasks into bite size chunks, improvise, and shift strategies to meet different types of challenges. Flexibility gives the human brain the edge over computers is flexible thinking. Elastic minds are people who reimagine new ways to solve existing problems and create tools to make things better, easier, faster and smarter.

Key takeaway. Today, in the digital age, we are witnessing a major shift. As work patterns, economic times, and digital technology evolves, the traditional work environment is growing, changing, and emerging with the times. The future of work is a lifestyle of personal preferences, personal development, and personal responsibility. The future is yours to shape. You have the power to change and adapt your skills to stay relevant and indispensable. Choose to prepare yourself for the future.

How to Create Better Email Habits

Email is convenient and fast but hurting our productivity. Our relationship with email is draining. A cluttered inbox will not only frustrate and stress you, but it will also distract you from getting real work done. According to McKinsey Institute, we spend close to a third of our work time managing emails. The average person checks email 77 times a day, sends and receives more than 122 email messages a day, and spends 28 percent or more of their workweek managing a constant influx of email.

On average, you spend thirteen hours a week consulting your email. Jocelyn K. Gleib, author of *"Unsubscribe: How to Kill Email Anxiety, Avoid Distractions and Get Real Work Done"* says that while checking emails throughout the day may make you feel productive, the opposite is true. For some individuals, though, checking email less frequently is simply not an option. The stockbroker who misses a business changing deal by logging off email is likely to feel more, not less, stressed.

Understand the psychology of email. Our brains love email refresh. Hence the desire to keep getting back to it. Email delivers important news, work and project updates, encouragement and fun notes from friends and family. It also delivers confirmation of a purchase, and even discounts that may save us money. But there is a dark side. The endless spam we try so hard to control. The discussions that go on for far too long. The

many newsletters we didn't sign up for. Email has become a necessary distraction. We need it, yet we hate it. The temptation to check email is understandable.

It's no wonder many of us develop the habit of checking our email over and over throughout the day. Most people tend to check their emails every five to 10 minutes. If you add up all of the minutes that it takes to continually check your inbox and then reply, it's easy to see why it's such a time waster. Some of us even pride ourselves on returning emails within minutes of receiving them. In her book, Jocelyn applies Newton's Third Law of Motion to the medium: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." Or said differently, the more you send, the more you receive. The problem is, we spend so much time responding and replying to emails that we end up caught in an endless email loop without getting real work done.

It's like a time vacuum. It's easy to lose track of how much time you spend. This habit interrupts workflow. And each interruption forces your brain to switch tasks. When you keep switching tasks, everything slows down. It destroys your momentum.

Psychologists and researchers claim our brains need up to 25 minutes to regain our momentum after each distraction. That's a lot of time to get back to "flow" mode. You don't want that, especially if you have deadlines to meet and deliverables to submit.

Every email you check leaves a mental footprint. A report from the London-based Future Work Centre, which conducts psychological research on people's workplace experiences, said emails were a "double-edged sword" that provided a useful means of communication but could also be a source of stress. Some messages stay in your mind long after you closed your email app. And they can distract you from focusing on important tasks. Now, imagine how that effect can hinder your ability to get things done if you consistently check your email several times a day. Let's now take a look at several actionable habits you can adopt to break your "email habit."

Treat emails like appointments with yourself. Check your emails on purpose. You will be surprised at how much time you can gain if you plan to check your emails instead of reacting to every message. You probably receive dozens or hundreds of emails everyday. But you don't have to respond to each one of them as and when they hit your inbox. Use email when you intend to, not just because it's always running in the background.

Schedule time to check and respond to them. Test different times of the morning, afternoon and evening you can use. Track which times best complement your schedule, energy levels and workflow. In an interview with The Telegraph, Jocelyn says, "...keep work emails short, simple and if something can't be resolved quickly on email, suggest a meeting or simply walk to your colleague's desk to confirm a plan. You'll be rescuing yourself and others from those annoying email threads that drag on for a whole afternoon, interrupting everyone involved." Use the 2-minutes rule when you make time for emails; if it takes less than two minutes, respond instead of marking it as "unread".

I use the action approach to clear my inbox: When I open an email, I make a quick decision: Delete/archive, act now (if it takes a minute or two) and then reply/archive, send a quick reply (and then archive) or add to my to-do list to do later at a specific time. I keep emails insanely short. Keeping them short means it's quick to reply.

Cut back on email push notifications. Turn off email notifications. Push notifications can ruin your work life. You don't even have to read those messages for your mental gears to toggle off what you are focusing on. Kill your notifications. Yes, really. Turn them all off. Smartphones aren't your problem. It's all the buzzing and dinging, endlessly calling for your attention. It's time to fight email distractions. Create an uninterrupted, free-flowing, idea-generating, peaceful space to get work done on time.

Pause emails to minimise distractions. “Inbox (1)” can be very distracting! With every email that comes in, it can be tough to stay focused on what you are doing. Leverage Inbox Pause. This allows you to work according to your schedule by holding emails back so they won’t appear in your Inbox until you are ready for them. “Pause” your inbox, get work done, then “Unpause” to fetch all new messages, respond or act on them, and repeat to get in the “flow” again. Block off times for deep focus work. There are extensions that. “Free Pause Gmail” Chrome extension prevents new emails from showing up in your inbox until you’re ready for them.

Create an email hierarchy. Filters + folders change everything. You’ve got to use filters and folders, especially if you manage multiple email addresses on one account. Filters point to folders for better email management. Don’t everything come into one main inbox folder and see it pile up all day. Filters are useful for organising incoming emails into folders. You can set up a filter manually (Settings) or you can build your filters as emails come into your inbox. You can create filters for both work and personal emails. You can build a filter based on an email address, or a subject line. Zach Hanlon, a marketing and sales expert who has worked with IBM, Oracle, and other businesses recommends you create Today, This Week, and This Month/Quarter folders:

Inbox: the inbox is a holding pen. Emails shouldn’t stay here any longer than it takes for you to file them into another folder. The exception to this rule is when you respond immediately and are waiting for an immediate response. Today: Everything that requires a response today. This Week: Everything that requires a response before the end of the week. This Month/Quarter: — Everything that needs a longer-term response.

Depending on your role, you may need a monthly folder. Others can operate on a quarterly basis. FYI: Most items I receive are informational. If I think I may need to reference an email again, I’ll save it to this folder. Adopt and use a folder structure that works specifically for you. You can always modify what’s not working and get better at

managing your inbox. Everyone's filtering and foldering system is individual and it might take you some time to work out what's best for you. Use canned responses in Gmail

Chances are you type the same responses for many emails. Use canned emails for that to save time and get back to work. Canned Responses, (a Gmail feature) allows you to save standard responses that can be inserted into emails at the click of a button.

To enable it: Go to Settings -> Advanced Tab-> Canned Responses(select enable), click save. To use Canned Responses, you must first write one. Open the Gmail compose window and type an email you want to use. Once you are done, click on the three dots in the bottom right corner of the compose window and click Canned responses. Enter the name of your canned response and click OK. That's it. You've created a response you can use for your replies. Whenever you need to reply with that response, open the email that needs the reply, click the three dot menu | Canned responses, and select the saved response you want to use from the Insert section of the menu.

Key takeaway. Email can quickly control your time and life if you don't take charge. Embrace better email habits that will allow you to clear your head and feel like you're on the right track. Make better connections, and stay in control. And always remember the mantra: "Not everything is urgent". It's up to you to protect your cognitive resources. The more you do to minimize task-switching over the course of the day, the more mental energy you'll have for activities that actually matter.

How to Spend The First Hour of Your Work Day on High-Value Tasks

Don't begin the activities of your day until you know exactly what you plan to accomplish. Don't start your day until you have it planned, says Jim Rohn.

Every morning, get one most important thing done immediately. There is nothing more satisfying than feeling like you're already in the flow. And the easiest way to trigger this feeling is to work on your most important task in the first hour.

Use your mornings for high-value work. Lean to avoid the busy work that adds no real value to your work, vision or long-term goal. Low value activities, including responding to notifications, or reacting to emails keep you busy and stop you from getting real work done. Make time for work that matters. In his book, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*, David Allen says, "If you don't pay appropriate attention to what has your attention, it will take more of your attention than it deserves." Research shows that it takes, on average, more than 23 minutes to fully recover your concentration after a trivial interruption.

Productive mornings start with early wake-up calls. "In a poll of 20 executives cited by Vanderkam, 90% said they wake up before 6 a.m. on weekdays. PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi, for example, wakes at 4 a.m. and is in the office no later than 7 a.m. Meanwhile, Disney CEO Bob Iger gets up at 4:30 to read, and Square CEO Jack Dorsey is up at 5:30 to jog." The first quiet hour of the morning can be the ideal time to focus on an important work project without being interrupted.

Don't plan your day in the first hour of your morning. Cut the planning and start doing real work. You are most active on a Monday Morning. Think about it. After a weekend of recovery, you have the most energy, focus and discipline to work on your priorities. Don't waste all that mental clarity and energy planning what to do in the next eight hours. Do your planning the night before. Think of Sunday as the first chance to prepare yourself for the week's tasks. Monday mornings will feel less dreadful and less overwhelming if you prepare the night before.

If you choose to prioritise...There are one million things you could choose to do in your first hour awake. If you choose to start your day with a daily checklist/to-do list, make sure that next to every task you have the amount of time it will take to complete them. The value of putting time to tasks is that, every time you check something off, you are able to measure how long it took you to get that task done, and how much progress you are making to better plan next time.

Get the uncomfortable out of the way. You probably know about Brian Tracy's "eat-a-frog"-technique from his classic time-management book, *Eat That Frog?* In the morning, right after getting up, you complete the most unwanted task you can think of for that day (= the frog). Ideally you've defined this task in the evening of the previous day. Completing an uncomfortable or difficult task not only moves it out of your way, but it gives you great energy because you get the feeling you've accomplished something worthwhile. Do you have a plan from yesterday? Kenneth Chenault, former CEO and Chairman of American Express, once said in an interview that the last thing he does before leaving the office is to write down the top 3 things to accomplish tomorrow, then using that list to start his day the following morning.

This productivity hack works for me. It helps me focus and work on key tasks. It also helps me disconnect at the end of the day and allow time for my brain to process and reboot. Trust me, planning your day the night before will give you back a lot wasted hours in the morning and lower your stress levels. Try this tonight. If you're happy with the results, then commit to trying it for a week. After a week, you'll be able to decide whether you want to add "night-before planning" to your life.

Daniel Goleman on What it Takes to Become a Genius

Psychological research has pointed to "grit" as a better predictor of success than IQ. But there is more. Grit is a combination of passion and perseverance, a belief that failure

can be overcome. It's a willingness to conquer challenges, instead of avoiding them. Dr. Angela Duckworth, author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, is the best-known researcher of grit, and she defines Grit as: "working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress." In *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*, celebrated psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman, best-known for his influential book *Emotional Intelligence*, explains what it takes to achieve long-term success and genius level excellence. The secret to continued improvement and peak performance isn't the amount of time invested in your craft but the quality of that time.

Think beyond autopilot habits. If you're going for genius level improvement, you need to continually shift away from autopilot and pursue active, corrective attention to the one thing you want to master. Autopilot performers get stuck at good and keep repeating the same processes instead of improving on their routines, shifting gears, and challenging their comfort zones. "Any sequence of mental action which has been frequently repeated tends to perpetuate itself," William James wrote in his influential meditation on habit, "so that we find ourselves automatically prompted to think, feel, or do what we have been before accustomed to think, feel, or do, under like circumstances."

Autopilot habits stand in the way of genius level performance. It's an endless loop. In *Maximize Your Potential: Grow Your Expertise, Take Bold Risks & Build an Incredible Career*, science writer Joshua Foer explores the mechanisms that keep us from improving and the strategies we can use to disarm them. He writes: In the 1960s, psychologists identified three stages that we pass through in the acquisition of new skills. We start in the "cognitive phase," during which we're intellectualizing the task, discovering new strategies to perform better, and making lots of mistakes. We're consciously focusing on what we're doing. Then we enter the "associative stage," when we're making fewer errors, and gradually getting better. Finally, we arrive at the

“autonomous stage,” when we turn on autopilot and move the skill to the back of our proverbial mental filing cabinet and stop paying it conscious attention.

The challenge, of course, is that we can’t get better on autopilot. The way to get better at a skill is to force yourself to practice just beyond your limits. You have to tweak your habits by pushing, allowing for more errors as you increase your limits. Daniel Goleman explains: Amateurs are content at some point to let their efforts become bottom-up operations. After about fifty hours of training — whether in skiing or driving — people get to that “good-enough” performance level, where they can go through the motions more or less effortlessly. They no longer feel the need for concentrated practice, but are content to coast on what they’ve learned. No matter how much more they practice in this bottom-up mode, their improvement will be negligible.

The experts, in contrast, keep paying attention top-down, intentionally counteracting the brain’s urge to automatize routines. They concentrate actively on those moves they have yet to perfect, on correcting what’s not working in their game, and on refining their mental models of how to play the game, or focusing on the particulars of feedback from a seasoned coach. Those at the top never stop learning: if at any point they start coasting and stop such smart practice, too much of their game becomes bottom-up and their skills plateau.

Direct attention and energy to where it needs to be. Additionally, the optimal kind of attention requires top-down focus. Focus doesn’t get the respect it deserves. Focus involves the ability to pay attention to things that will help and avoid distractions that will hurt your work efforts. If you can take control of your ability to focus and block out distractions, you will give yourself a powerful tool that will enable you to perform at a consistently high level. Goleman argues in *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*: Paying full attention seems to boost the mind’s processing speed, strengthen synaptic connections, and expand or create neural networks for what we are practicing.

At least at first. But as you master how to execute the new routine, repeated practice transfers control of that skill from the top-down system for intentional focus to bottom-up circuits that eventually make its execution effortless. Most athletes have discovered from experience that concentration or the ability to focus effectively on the task at hand while ignoring distractions is one of the keys to effective performance. In the rest of *Focus*, Goleman explores and explains how concepts like attention-chunking, emotional empathy, and system blindness influence the pursuit of excellence.

The Basic Principles For Solving Just About Any Problem

Problems are part of everyday life. How you deal with challenges in life has a lot to do with your success and happiness. At work, solving problems (big or small) increases your value and empowers your team to think critically as well. Problem-solving is a skill. It's something you can improve over time. There are two ways to solve most problems: you either use old systems or figure out a new path and think beyond the first level.

1. The systematic problem-solving method. The common and most popular is to use the path of least resistance. You come up with a quick solution you already know, you use a strategy that has worked in the past or engage the services of people who have built systems to solve niche problems, and that's the end of the cycle. For the most part, you are able to quickly solve your problem without major issues. It works in many environments, especially if you have deadlines to meet. But the solution is usually common, and expected. By all means, find and build a system that works for you, but continue to look for more ways to make your system even better. Continue to perfect your problem-solving system or skill to serve your clients or customers better. The more effectively you solve problems, the more value you create.

2. The second approach requires more effort: a higher-order cognitive process

“No problem can stand the assault of sustained thinking,” says Voltaire. This process required a new system. You figure out a new path. You give yourself time to reflect on the problem and come up with a new, even novel solution. The process makes you more skilful, curious and most importantly gives you a deeper understanding. If you have the time for it, it’s more rewarding. But it’s not an easy process. Most people don’t have time for a higher-order cognitive process, so they settle, or rely on existing systems.

Approach problems with a “could” mindset. “Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns to look at things in a different way,” says Edward de Bono. In many situations when people encounter a problem, they tend to default to what they should do instead of asking what they could do. Could help you think outside an existing problem to generate more creative solutions. Should narrow your thinking process to one answer, the one that seems most obvious. “...when we think in terms of “could,” we stay open-minded and the trade-offs involved inspire us to come up with creative solutions,” says Francesca Gino of Harvard Business Review. If you can resist time pressure, and give yourself a moment to reflect, you will come up with options, even better solutions. “What if...?” and “How about...?” are questions that open up possibilities for better solutions.

Rethink boundaries. Scientists are great at this. They don’t assume anything. They don’t stop questioning either. Their job is to question basic assumptions to figure things out. The idea is to take everything apart, and think beyond the existing principle. This process opens up your mind to new ways to figure out better solutions. For a better solution, don’t rush the thinking process. Many people assume that they just need to think harder when faced with a tough decision to make, or when they are trying to solve a difficult problem. But concentrating harder won’t force that ‘eureka moment’ you need.

Instead, your best option might be to step away from the problems and do something unrelated to the project. Give your brain time to process the problem. You will be amazed at the results.

When you stop thinking about a task, your brain continues working on the problem in the background. “To solve a problem creatively, to have an insight, our brain tends to escape visual distractors, to physically block information, and to look somewhere else. You don’t want to overload your mind with visual information, because you want to focus more inwardly, and you get into this ‘offline mode’ where you’re very pensive,” says Carola Salvi, an Italian post-doctoral researcher at the creative brain lab at Northwestern University. Give your brain the opportunity to reorganize the problem and come up with a better solution. And when you have an insightful moment— where the solution pops into your mind out of nowhere — you should trust it, because it’s probably the correct one.

The power of the incubation period. Scientists have been studying the “incubation period” for years. For many years, they have found that amazing ideas, solutions to problems and obstacles often come to people when they aren’t actively trying to develop a solution. The incubation period works because your brain gets to take a break from everything distracting you. People experience a spark of genius when they are busy doing something unrelated to the problem they are trying to solve. You don’t have to take a long incubation period to make the most of it. Even just 10 minutes might be enough to help your brain gain a new perspective. The next time you’re tempted to find a quick solution to that problem, remember the incubation period, and give your brain the opportunity to surprise you.

It pays to sleep on it. Your memory consolidates when you are awake, allowing little time to make deeper connections. The opposite is true. The brain makes better connections when you are asleep, allowing you to make new and useful associations

between unrelated ideas. In many cases, when you are tempted to stay up late to find a solution to an obstacle, you might be better sleeping on it. Your brain might solve the problem for you while you're fast asleep.

Work backward. When thinking about a process, we're often fixated to follow the same sequence in our mind. This way we miss opportunities to use insights that stem from following an alternative sequence, such as working backwards. To solve some problems better, you may need to undo the key actions in the problem. Start consciously from the end of the process and develop it step by step from there. Reverse engineering changes everything. It allows you to notice patterns your brain normally ignores. When you work backward, your mind slows down. You begin to see things you didn't see before. Working backward works when the final result is clear but the initial portion of a problem is obscure.

Key takeaways. Life is one big maze, but the obstacle is always the way. Many problems can be solved by finding interesting, and better connections between seemingly unrelated topics. In any situation that demands better solutions, explore your options, question basic assumptions, use improved systems, build new approaches, rethink the usual boundaries, give your brain the opportunity to incubate better, and work backward to notice patterns you normally ignore.

How to Get More Work Done in a Week Than Most People Do in a Month

There's no single hack for getting more work done in less time, but instead a host of habits, and work systems can produce the best return on your time. Getting more work done is about knowing what to do, when to do it, and how to get it done in the shortest possible time to maximise the little time you have everyday. It means choosing tasks that strategically align with your work objectives. It's the ratio between input and output.

Is everything really urgent? What are the most important actions you can take today that will get you closer to your work goals in the shortest possible time? Imagine the repercussions of choosing to do urgent (but not important) tasks instead of focusing on important actions. “The secret to mastering your time is to systematically focus on importance and suppress urgency.” Oliver Emberton said that. Urgency wrecks productivity. Urgent but unimportant tasks are major distractions.

In 1954, former U.S President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “I have two kinds of problems: the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent.” Separating important tasks from urgent ones is a problem for many people. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent. Urgent tasks put us into constant “reply mode.” They are distractions. Important work are tasks we have planned that move goals. Our brains are so drawn to urgency that we choose “objectively worse options over objectively better (important) options. To maximise time and do more focused work, question your choices constantly, and develop the ability to watch your mind as it gets whipped up by sudden requests. When a task you have not planned to do falls onto your plate, ask yourself: “Is this really important?” And then think about not only how, but when, to best handle it.

What’s on your plate? When you try to tackle too many tasks everyday, you will be overwhelmed and achieve less. When everything is important, you will be tempted to skillfully juggle multiple priorities at the same time, and your productivity suffers in the process. It pays to prioritise your tasks and work on the most important ones first thing in the morning, when you are most active. “Even if everything on your plate is supposed to be equally important, you still need a way to break down which ones you spend your time on, and how you slice up your time,” says Alan Henry of Lifehacker Whenever you are faced with a lot to do, take a step back to recognise the rushed mindset and its consequences. Instead of rushing to get them done at the same time, start by asking yourself: “Is this really important?” And then think about not only how, but when, to best

handle it. Ultimately, the goal should be to question your choices constantly, and to develop the ability to recognise tasks that just distract you from your real work.

Stop feeding your distractions, Interruptions like notifications, loud noises, social media, someone knocking on your door, and switching to check emails every now and then, break your flow. They interrupt your concentration. They're just enough to pull your focus away and make you have to start over. Anytime you are pulled away from your tasks, it takes time to readjust to them when you jump back in — up to 25 minutes in many cases. Your life keeps diminishing while you waste your time feeding your distractions.

Successful people prioritise! They focus! They disconnect from everything else to get tasks done. Beware of deceptive time-wasting activities that disguise themselves as work; Lengthy discussions with colleagues, long meetings and treating other people's work as "emergencies" when you should be concentrating on your high-value work. Writing in the first century, Seneca was surprised by how little people seemed to value their lives as they were living them — how busy, terribly busy, everyone seemed to be, and wasteful of their time. He noticed how even wealthy people hustled their lives along, ruining their fortune, anticipating a time in the future when they would rest.

In his book (translated by John W. Basore), "*On the Shortness of Life*," Seneca offers powerful insights into the art of living. He observed, "It is not that we have so little time but that we lose so much ...The life we receive is not short but we make it so; we are not ill provided but use what we have wastefully." "Life is long if you know how to use it," he counselled. Take control of your time and start distributing it right. Start by reviewing your daily routine. Track your daily activities for some time to clearly see where your time is being spent.

Meetings, phone calls, emails, notifications, small chats, and many other distractions are constantly splitting your attention. Record ALL your appointments, deadlines, and everything in-between. Analyse the actual time you spend on each activity with what you think is the best amount for each. Schedule the heck out of your days. Schedule everything in advance. Make a plan and know what's going on each day. This helps you figure out how you're spending your time. Notice where time leaks, then declutter your routine.

Stop doing busywork. Busy does not necessarily mean productive. Busy work makes you feel like you are moving quickly and being productive in the process. But in effect, you are not. If you took time to measure your work, you will be surprised at how little valuable work you are doing. Oliver Burkeman of BBC writes, "When you're busy, you're more likely to make poor time-management choices — taking on commitments you can't handle, or prioritising trifling tasks over crucial ones. A vicious spiral kicks in: your feelings of busyness leave you even busier than before." Many of us confuse being "busy" with being effective, or efficient. If you start your day by answering emails. You could get sucked into answering questions, replying to every email, and advancing the cause of other people's actions.

Be proactive about your emails. Don't get caught up in reactive mode. "Most of us have no problem with being busy, but we're often busy with the wrong things," says Angie Morgan, co-author of *Spark: How to Lead Yourself and Others to Greater Success*. "You could spend nine to five just emailing, but that's not driving results or moving you toward longer, bigger goals. When people say, 'I'm so busy,' it really means, 'I'm a poor planner,' or, 'I don't know how to prioritise or delegate.'" Adopt the "one thing" approach. Make the hard choices and work on your most important priorities instead of responding to urgent tasks. Your time is limited. Doing everything is not an option.

A simple system to change how you work. Set a very clear intention of how your day will go the next morning, particularly in the beginning, the night before. Visualising this intention and writing it down into your schedule can make it happen more automatically in the morning without wasting time. Planning tomorrow today is a powerful habit that changes everyday. It's a system that can completely change how you work: Before the day ends, identify and write down the best actions (to-do) you need to take tomorrow that will help you get closer to your work goals. Every morning, focus on completing your action list from yesterday before midday. Rinse, improve and repeat. Every day. Every week. Every month. Every year. You could double your efficiency with this simple process/habit.

Adopt the 1–3–5 method to create and manage your action list for the day. On any given day, assume that you can only accomplish one big thing, three medium things, and five small things, and narrow down your to-do list to those nine items. This means that your daily schedule will feature: One very important task, three tasks of medium importance, five little things, of course, this can be flexible, depending on important actions you need to take to advance your work goals. A daily priority list gives you a great roadmap to follow so that you don't feel overwhelmed and don't have to waste time thinking about what needs to be done. I use a combination of these methods to get through the day depending on how much work I have to get through. As you practice being ruthless with your to-do, you'll find it gets easier and you'll be able to pick the right method at the right time.

A Systematic Approach to Life

Successful people don't just drift off to the top. Getting there requires focused action, personal discipline and lots of energy every day to make things happen," says American author and entrepreneur Jack Canfield. Jack couldn't be more accurate. Don't let old

habits hold you back in life. Take control of your habits and improve the quality of your life. Build a system for everything you do. It pays to build systems to keep your life on track. In *“How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big”*, author Scott Adams explains: “... A system is something you do on a regular basis that achieves your odds of happiness in the long run. If you do something every day, it’s a system. If you’re waiting to achieve it someday in the future, it’s a goal.” Systems are the foundations of a better life and great work. Using systems can make your life easier. A system provides you with an inner guidance system and equips you with the power of habit.

A structure in your life and some routines that help you every day and keep you on the right track is better than a single shot at getting something done. Start anything with a clear goal and focus on a system to achieve it. Many people have different successful systems that guide how they work and what actions to take at any point in time to achieve the bigger purpose. If your current system of work doesn’t work or give the desired results you expect, make a change, create a new system and take steps every day to stick to it. By spending a little bit of time figuring out what will work best for you and your habits, you can put yourself in a great position to get out of your head and get things done.

Reserving an hour each day for something you absolutely want to get done can be a great system that can help you achieve your big goal. Guardian’s Oliver Burkman says, “...focusing on a system means focusing on what you can control (your actions) rather than what you can’t (the endlessly unpredictable external world). Keep working your system and you’ll maximize the chances that success will find you.” You can start building systems one habit at a time. Focus on incremental progress and consistency to lay the foundation for getting things done. A daily or weekly routine, a consistent application of even small habits, will transform your life more effectively than striving for an overwhelmingly large goal without a consistent routine to achieve it.

A better life starts with a great daily routine. As simple as it sounds, routines are the key to improving your health, productivity, wealth and total well-being. Creating a daily routine can make a big difference in your life. How you start and end your day determines everything. That means, developing a system to guide how you use your time when you awake, when you first start working, when you finish your workday, and even how you use your evenings. How will that change your life? It will help you get a great start to your day, and finish your day by preparing for the next day. It'll help you build productive routines, and help you focus on what's important, not just what's urgent.

Make time for high-value work. Don't start your day until you have it planned, says Jim Rohn. Spend the first hour of your work day on high-value tasks. Don't begin the activities of your day until you know exactly what you plan to accomplish. Every morning, get one most important thing done immediately. There is nothing more satisfying than feeling like you're already in the flow. And the easiest way to trigger this feeling is to work on your most important task in the first hour. Use your mornings for high-value work. Learn to avoid the busy work that adds no real value to your work, vision or long-term goal. Low value activities, including responding to notifications, or reacting to emails keep you busy and stop you from getting real work done. Make time for work that matters.

In his book, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*, David Allen says, "If you don't pay appropriate attention to what has your attention, it will take more of your attention than it deserves." Research shows that it takes, on average, more than 23 minutes to fully recover your concentration after a trivial interruption. Don't tackle tasks sporadically throughout the day. To increase your ability to focus, researchers suggest ideas for both boosting our ability to concentrate as well as reducing distraction. You can improve your ability to focus if you can boost your ability to concentrate.

Reducing distractions can change how you work for the better. Everything competing for your attention when you want to single task can waste your precious time. In *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction, and Get the Right Things Done*, Peter Bregman writes, “To get the right things done, choosing what to ignore is as important as choosing where to focus.” Time wasters such as impulsively checking notifications is a major distraction at work. The few minutes you waste on reactive tendencies doesn’t help your work.

Learn to single-task without compromise. Single tasking changes everything. In an age of constant digital interruptions, it is no wonder you’re having trouble ignoring distractions. If you really have to focus on that task, limit the time you have to spend on any given task. Add dates, and due time to your to-do lists. Push yourself to deliver within the specified time and move on. Single-tasking is one task at a time, with zero tolerance for distractions. Try the Pomodoro Technique to improve your chances of success when you embrace the single-tasking habit. Focus on one task for about 30 minutes, then take a 5 minute break, and then move on to another task or continue the task. Read widely, with maximum curiosity. Pick up a book every day. Even for just a few pages. Reading puts your brain to work. Reading is to the mind what exercise is to your body. It gives us freedom to roam the expanse of space, time, history, and offer a deeper view of ideas, concepts, emotions, and body of knowledge.

Roberto Bolaño says, “Reading is like thinking, like praying, like talking to a friend, like expressing your ideas, like listening to other people’s ideas, like listening to music, like looking at the view, like taking a walk on the beach.” Your brain on books is active — growing, changing and making new connections and different patterns, depending on the type of material you’re reading. One of the best ways to gain knowledge is self-education. Period. It doesn’t matter if you’re sitting in a college classroom or a coffee shop. As long as you are genuinely interested in what you are studying, don’t stop. Make the most of your time and get the best education you can offer yourself.

People who take the time and initiative to pursue knowledge on their own are the only ones who earn a real education in this world. Take a look at any widely acclaimed scholar, entrepreneur or historical figure you can think of. Formal education or not, you'll find that he or she is a product of continuous self-education.

Lifelong learning will get most of your questions answered. You don't even have to commit long hours everyday to learning. Whatever time you decide to put in your own education, stick to it. What are the most interesting topics you wish to know more about? The goal here is to find as many sources of ideas and knowledge as possible. Brain Pickings is a good place to start. It's one of my favorites. And it's free. Go subscribe and you won't be disappointed. Find other blogs, websites or online courses that can broaden your horizon. Read expert opinions about topics of interest on Quora. It's a game-changer in the world of question and answer websites. Look for answers to some of your most important questions at places people normally ignore.

Cut back on social distractions. In the age of constant connectivity, distraction is at its peak in life and at work. Our minds need urgent purification to improve focus, replenish attention, and encourage creativity. The average adult checks their phone 50 to 300 times each day. And we tap, swipe and click on our devices 2,617 times per day, according to a recent study. We spend more time online than we do asleep.

Chris Bailey, author of *Hyperfocus*, writes, "Our smartphones provide an endless stream of bite-sized, delicious information for our brains to consume. It's easy to get hooked, even to feel addicted. And most of us would prefer not to feel this way." I have turned off most of the notifications on my phone. I choose when I want to check my notifications. I have consciously planned to check social updates at a set time to avoid distractions when I am doing focused work. Every time you pull out your phone to scan your feeds, your brain is building a habit loop that reinforces itself to encourage the habit.

Notifications prompt task-irrelevant thoughts and disrupt attention performance even if you don't interact with the device. The buzzes, beeps, emails, alerts, and notifications never end until you do something about it. An increasing number of psychologists and doctors are concerned about our relationship with smartphones. "It's a spectrum disorder," says Dr. Anna Lembke, a psychiatrist at Stanford University, who studies addiction. "There are mild, moderate and extreme forms." And for many people, there's no problem at all.

According to David Greenfield, a clinical psychiatrist and founder of the Center for Internet and Technology Addiction, smartphones can easily take over your life, because they're always screaming for attention. Being constantly plugged in affects our sleep patterns, posture and more in our bodies and minds. Our lives are becoming more wired all the time, hence the need to take over and control your relationship with mobile devices before they become the only thing you deeply care about at the expense of your relationships. If you feel your phone is taking over your life, schedule digital detox on your calendar. Start balancing your digital life with real life.

Do a 30-day challenge. The challenge most of us have is starting and sticking to a healthy and productive daily routine. You can start with a 30-day challenge to develop the perfect routine that works for you. What do you want to improve? Write them out on paper, along with your motivations, obstacles, and strategies for overcoming them.

Start with a few habits you can consistently focus on building. Report on your progress each day. Adjust anything that is not working on a case-by-case basis. Then do an assessment after 30 days to see how your new routine is working for you. If you fail, figure out what went wrong, plan for it, and try again. You don't always have full control over your workday, but you can plan and make the most of your day to help you accomplish your life and work goals. You can use them to make sure the most

important stuff gets done — from working out, spending time with friends and family, to developing a side business, to reading and engaging in other hobbies.

Compare Yourself to Who You Were Yesterday, Not to Who Someone Else is Today

Jordan Peterson said that. It's rule number 4 of his best-selling book, *12 Rules For Life*. "No one else is really like you in any deep sense," Peterson said. "The conditions of your life truly are unique." You have no idea how much time and effort someone else has put into achieving the results you envy. Channel your envy into purpose. "The only person you should try to be better than is who you were yesterday." The pragmatic principle of this chapter is to consistently bargain with yourself to make small incremental positive changes in your life. The idea is not only measurable but also fulfilling to see the little gradual improvements in your own life. "Anyone who isn't embarrassed of who they were last year probably isn't learning enough," says Alain de Botton. Peterson encourages us to avoid comparing our progress against others but instead against where we previously had been. It's a great way to make progress in life. The human brain has a natural tendency to make comparisons as a system of developing logic and reasoning.

You can't stop comparing. It's inevitable. But you can channel your brain to make a better comparison in your long-term interest, growth, and happiness. Change the object of comparison to yourself. If the urge to compare is too strong to ignore, measure yourself against yourself. Once you truly understand how to let go of your comparison mindset, you will see the world from an entirely different perspective. The dangers of pinning our happiness/progress on how we measure up to others are too great to ignore. The more you desperately want to be like someone else, the more unworthy you feel. The more you desperately want to be happier, the lonelier you become, despite the

awesome people surrounding you. What do you know about yourself? You are here to live your own story. Don't focus on the actions of other people, but on your own. Aiming at the wrong thing has serious adverse consequences. It causes us to miss other important things in life.

“There is an endless supply of people to whom you could compare yourself and your accomplishments, but, inevitably, you'll always end up on the losing side of the comparison. That's because there will always be someone who has done something that you wished you could also accomplish” says Lisa Quest of Forbes.

Living in constant envy of others is not wisdom. Wisdom is facing the world exactly as it is and opening our eyes to opportunities to improve ourselves, the world and those around us. In life we only see what we aim at. The rest of the world (and that's most of it) is hidden. If you consistently focus on everything you don't have, instead of who you were yesterday and how far you've come, you will build self-doubt overtime. When you start aiming at something different — something like “I want to be better than I was yesterday ” — your minds will start presenting you with new information, derived from your previously hidden self, to aid you in your new pursuit and quest to become a better version of yourself. The idea is to start using yourself yesterday as a baseline, so you can at least notice the direction and magnitude of the changes you can make today.

With enough information about who were yesterday, you can use this knowledge to influence your future actions so that on average you are improving over time. The key to the good life you really need is giving a damn about what's important to your growth, career and total well being.

To improve daily, put your gap time to good use. Anywhere from 1–3 hours of your day is probably spent in “gaptime.” Gap times are those between meaningful activities but aren't normally long enough to get more done. Or the time you need to recover from

deep work. Whether it's 10 minutes or 1 hour a day, all of us can devote a small portion of our time to learning, and personal growth. Your life and career depends on it. Commuting to work, waiting in line, small talks at the office, small breaks in your schedule, long breaks from work and everything you do when you are not actively working on your tasks for the day. You can listen to a podcast, learn a new skill, read a book, read the articles you've bookmarked, plan the rest of your day, or better still take a productive pause to clear your mind. You can cut back on other low-value activities (responding to social media distractions) to make time for learning. I make time for personal growth by making time.

Spend most of your free time learning. Make the most of every little spare time to get better everyday. "It's not the big things that add up in the end; it's the hundreds, thousands, or millions of little things that separate the ordinary from the extraordinary, says Darren Hardy," author of *The Compound Effect*. Extraordinary people don't manage time, they make time for what's important. Make time for yourself. Darren lays out a simple formula in the first chapter of his book: Small, Smart Choices + Consistency + Time = RADICAL DIFFERENCE. According to Darren, "Small, seemingly insignificant steps completed consistently over time will create a radical difference" in your life and put you on the road to the career success you want and deserve.

You don't need a radical process to grow or become your best self. The small choices you make daily matters. Creating a career development plan with goals and objectives; and then work toward accomplishing these at a comfortable pace, bearing in mind what you accomplished yesterday. Take charge of your life. If you're unsatisfied with the present, do something different that will improve your odds of success. Stop giving a f*ck about everything you are not and start living! Your life will significantly improve if you care less about what you are not, and care more about becoming the best version of yourself.

Thinking Your Way to a Better Brain (John Dewey on How We Think)

Learning how to think is hard. Thinking is the core of our being, but the world is hostile to serious thought. In an age of information overload, the depth of thinking is becoming less and less valued. Information — even good information — can become a distraction if you're not thinking about it, evaluating it, or analyzing it. Most of us can't afford to think. And some people are okay with not knowing. Not because they don't have the capacity for thought, but because they have chosen to spend their time elsewhere. Thinking is unfamiliar. Thinking can force us out of comforting habits, and it can even complicate our relationships with like-minded friends.

Thinking is also slow, and that's a problem when our habits of consuming information (mostly online) leave us lost in the spin cycle of social media, partisan bickering, and confirmation bias. Most people's thinking processes emerge in their emotional life and moral character. And when we don't really know a subject well enough, in T. S. Eliot's words, "we tend always to substitute emotions for thoughts," and go with whatever idea makes us feel popular. Part of living well is thinking well because if one thinks the wrong thoughts it is hard to do the right thing to get the best results.

Think better. Do better. In its loosest sense, thinking signifies everything that, as we say, is "in our heads " or that "goes through our minds." A thinking process begins with a dilemma that suggests alternatives, and so thinking is evoked by confusion. If you consistently choose not to dig deeper, you will make plans around being wrong. Deep thinking just means absorbing important information and using that to form a decision or opinion of your own — rather than just spouting off what you hear others say. To think means to bridge a gap in experience, to bind together facts or deeds otherwise isolated. In his 1910 masterpiece "How We Think", John Dewey examines what separates thinking, a basic human faculty we take for granted, from thinking well, what it takes to train ourselves into mastering the art of thinking.

The spark of thinking, Dewey argues, is a kind of psychological restlessness rooted in ambiguity: "Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a forked-road situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives. As long as our activity glides smoothly along from one thing to another, or as long as we permit our imagination to entertain fancies at pleasure, there is no call for reflection. Difficulty or obstruction in the way of reaching a belief brings us, however, to a pause. In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another..."

Demand for the solution of a perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection... This need of straightening out a perplexity also controls the kind of inquiry undertaken. A traveler whose end is the most beautiful path will look for other considerations and will test suggestions occurring to him on another principle than if he wishes to discover the way to a given city. The problem fixes the end of thought and the end controls the process of thinking. Thinking is synonymous with believing, says Dewey.

To say 'I think that it is going to rain tomorrow' is equivalent to saying 'I believe that it is going to rain tomorrow'. When we say 'Men used to think that the earth was flat', we refer to a belief system that our ancestors held about the earth — they used to think, i.e. believe, that the earth was flat. Dewey argues it's not enough to simply have beliefs, but that we must also do the work required to examine them, to understand why we hold them, and to assess the consequences of holding such beliefs.

To truly think, Dewey argues, we ought to consider not only the origin of our beliefs but also how they affect our actions, which they inevitably do: Reflective thought is the most potent antidote to erroneous beliefs, says Dewey: "Active, persistent, and careful

consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought... It is a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of reasons.” This basis of reasons, Dewey argues, is a relational framework for how different bits of knowledge connect to and validate one another.

To think well is to construct fruitful linkages: “[The] function by which one thing signifies or indicates another, and thereby leads us to consider how far one may be regarded as warrant for belief in the other, [is] the central factor in all reflective or distinctively intellectual thinking... Reflection thus implies that something is believed in (or disbelieved in), not on its own direct account, but through something else which stands as witness, evidence, proof, voucher, warrant; that is, as a ground of belief.” There is no single uniform power of thought, but the multitude of observations, memories, imagination, and common sense, that together comprise thoughts. To a better capacity for thought, we need to develop curiosity and the habit of exploring and testing. These will increase questioning and the love of inquiry which will ultimately lead to critical and deep thinking habits.

Pay attention to the right details to make better inferences. Dewey encourages us to embrace systematic inference to improve our reasoning. An inference is a step of the mind, an intellectual act by which one concludes that something is true in light of something else’s being true, or seeming to be true. People automatically make inferences to gain a basis for understanding and action. So quickly and automatically do we make inferences that we do not, without training, notice them as inferences. We see dark clouds and infer rain. We hear the door slam and infer that someone has arrived. We see a frowning face and infer that the person is upset. We read a book, and interpret what the various sentences and paragraphs say — indeed what the whole book — is saying. We listen to what people say and make a series of inferences as to what they mean.

An important part of critical thinking is the art of bringing what is subconscious in our thought to the level of conscious realization. This includes the recognition that our experiences are shaped by the inferences we make during those experiences. Critical thinkers notice the inferences they are making, the assumptions upon which they are basing those inferences, and the point of view about the world they are developing. Dewey writes: "Systematic inference, in short, means the recognition of definite relations of interdependence between considerations previously unorganized and disconnected, this recognition being brought about by the discovery and insertion of new facts and properties." Humans naturally and regularly use beliefs as assumptions and make inferences based on assumptions (something we take for granted or presuppose. Usually it is something we previously learned and do not question. It is part of our system of beliefs). We assume our beliefs to be true and use them to interpret the world about us. If our belief is a sound one, our assumption is sound. If our belief is not sound, our assumption is not sound.

Beliefs, and hence assumptions, can be unjustified or justified, depending upon whether we do or do not have good reasons for them. We need to make logical inferences based on sound assumptions. We need to understand our own point of view and fully consider other relevant viewpoints. Dewey advises us to doubt our first solution, to keep searching, and to search for much longer than expected, as this is what is required for good thinking. Better thinking doesn't end. The more knowledge you cultivate, the better you'll become at thinking about it. It's navel gazing in that you're constantly thinking about thinking, but the end result is a brain that automatically forms better arguments, focused ideas, and creative solutions to problems.

Wabi-Sabi: The Japanese Philosophy For a Perfectly Imperfect Life

Life is unpredictable. And that's okay. Embrace it. When nothing is certain, everything is possible! Your plans for tomorrow, next month or next year may not unfold as you expect. But it's important to make plans and move on. Landon Donovan once said, "Life isn't perfect, of course, but we all know it's how you react to things that counts."

Imperfection is the basic principle of Wabi-Sabi, the Japanese philosophy of accepting your imperfections and making the most of life. "Wabi" is said to be defined as "rustic simplicity" or "understated elegance" with a focus on a less-is-more mentality. "Sabi" is translated to "taking pleasure in the imperfect."

The concept of wabi-sabi, is wide and almost impossible to distill in a single post, but can easily be applied simply to moments of everyday life. The relentless pursuit of perfection — in possessions, relationships, achievements — often leads to stress, anxiety, depression and hasty judgement. This is where wabi-sabi invites a pause. The Japanese philosophy encourages us to focus on the blessings hiding in our daily lives, and celebrate the way things are rather than how they should be. Wabi-sabi prizes authenticity. Wabi-Sabi is "a way of life that appreciates and accepts complexity while at the same time values simplicity," writes Richard Powell in his book, *Wabi Sabi Simple*. Richard says it acknowledges three simple realities: "Nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect." In Zen philosophy, there are seven aesthetic principles in achieving wabi-sabi:

- Kanso — simplicity
- Fukinsei — asymmetry or irregularity
- Shibumi — beauty in the understated
- Shizen — naturalness without pretense
- Yugen — subtle grace
- Datsuzoku — freeness
- Seijaku — tranquility

The timeless wisdom of wabi-sabi is more relevant now than ever for modern life, as we search for meaning and fulfilment beyond materialism. Wabi-sabi is like minimalism with a conscious choice. The concept has its roots in the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. A common explanation is an example of a well-loved teacup, made by an artist's hands, cracked or chipped by constant use. Such traces remind the observer that nothing is permanent — even fixed objects are subject to change. A great example of wabi-sabi in creativity is the art of kintsugi, where cracked pottery is filled with gold dusted lacquer as a way to showcase the beauty of its age and damage rather than hiding it.

The fault is not hidden but highlighted. This is not to say the Craftsman was sloppy (wabi-sabi isn't an excuse for poor craftsmanship). Wabi-sabi draws attention to the cracks in a teacup as part of the beauty of the object. In his book *The Unknown Craftsman*, Soetsu Yanagi argues that imperfections are necessary for a full appreciation of the object and the world. We in our own human imperfections are repelled by the perfect, since everything is apparent from the start and there is no suggestion of the infinite. Wabi-sabi is everywhere, you just need to know how to look, and what to do to embrace the concept in your life. The cracks in the old teacup are seen as assets rather than flaws.

“Wabi sabi is a different kind of looking, a different kind of mindset,” explains Robyn Griggs Lawrence, author of *Simply Imperfect: Revisiting the Wabi-Sabi House*. “It's the true acceptance of finding beauty in things as they are,” he says. What does it take to embrace Wabi-sabi in your life? Robyn explains that you don't need money, or special skills to appreciate your imperfections and make the most of life. Bringing wabi-sabi into your life doesn't require money, training, or special skills. It takes a mind quiet enough to appreciate muted beauty, courage not to fear bareness, willingness to accept things as they are — without ornamentation. It depends on the ability to slow down, to shift the balance from doing to being, to appreciating rather than perfecting.

Mike Sturm says Wabi-sabi is about accepting yourself and building on what you already have in life. He writes. Embracing wabi-sabi is as easy (or as difficult) as understanding and accepting yourself — imperfections and all. It's about being compassionate with yourself as you are, and building on whatever that is — not feverishly trying to rebuild yourself in order to pose as something else entirely. Today, appreciation of the things we have, people we love, and the experiences we have the opportunity to weave into our lives is losing value. Wabi-sabi represents a precious cache of wisdom that values tranquility, harmony, beauty and imperfection, and can strengthen your resilience in the face of materialism. It gently motions you to relax, slow down, step back from the hectic modern world and find enjoyment and gratitude in everything you do. Put simply, wabi-sabi gives you permission to be yourself. Embrace the perfection of being imperfectly you.

Make Your Own Rules For Life

What do you want out of life? Do you know? A lot of people have trouble answering this question. Seneca once said, “Most powerful is he who has himself in his own power.” Are you in control of your life? We all need personal philosophy in life or we risk wandering, and responding to random stimuli and information with little or no impact on our long-term goals. A philosophy of life is an overall vision or attitude toward life and the purpose of it. Human activities are limited by time, and death. But we forget this. We fill up our time with distractions, never asking whether they are important, whether we really find them of value. “You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think” says Marcus Aurelius. Without a personal philosophy, we end up living without direction. A few simple rules that shape and guide my life.

- The meaning of life is the meaning you decide to give it.
- Life is about solving problems, and every obstacle is the way forward.

- You are the author of your own life.
- Make improvements, not excuses.
- Life is short. Do what brings out the best in you.
- Question your assumptions at all times.
- Effort matters more than skill or talent.
- It pays to create your own certainty.
- You'll be happier if you focus on efforts only on the things in your control.

The idea of a life philosophy, comes back to a central question, one that Mary Oliver asks: "What will you do with your one wild and precious life? Living without purpose is dangerous. Nothing gives a person inner wholeness and peace like a distinct understanding of where they are going.

Until you settle on a purpose, your life is in danger of having little meaning except for self-gratification. Robert Bryne once observed, "The purpose of life is a life of purpose." In order to get somewhere, you need to define your end goal. That is essential. And the sooner you define it, the clearer everything else will become. A life without a purpose is a life without a destination. Finding the right direction in life is an existential problem for all of us. "Life must be understood backwards. But it must be lived forward," said Søren Kierkegaard.

What do you look forward to in life? Fyodor Dostoyevsky once said, "The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for." Finding the right direction in life is something you create. You make the decision to act. To try. To do something. No matter how small. At some point in life, you're going to have to stop thinking about taking action and act. Your purpose in life is to find and do the things that make you smile, laugh and forget time. Even if you aren't sure yet, move into the exploration and experimentation phase of your life and enjoy the journey. You

can't put time on it. You can't force yourself to find your "why" tomorrow or next month, or even next year. But by all means, search for clarity.

In the 1940s, Viktor E. Frankl, was held prisoner in Nazi concentration camps. With all the agony and brutality, what kept Frankl from giving up his relentless fight for his life was purpose! He found meaning in his struggle, and that's what gave him the power to push forward through unimaginable pain. A quote by Viktor nicely sums up his philosophy on how people were able to survive the camps, without losing the will to live. In his book, "*Man's Search for Meaning*", Viktor says "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'." Once you have defined your aims and what you want, it is easier to deal with doubts. Easier not to get distracted from what is important, keep your focus, and keep moving.

Only sustained movement in one direction can bring tangible results. You have permission to change your goal, rethink, choose another, by all means. It's hard to maintain any momentum if your direction lacks definition. In order to reach big goals, you need time, during which you must continue moving in your chosen direction, not veering off course. Defining your direction as early as possible is the most important decision in sports. But, curiously enough, this is also the most important decision in life in general, but much fewer people realize it. Living "on purpose" means you live intentionally.

Napoleon Hill once said "There is one quality that one must possess to win, and that is definiteness of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants, and a burning desire to possess it. In order to get what you want, you have to choose one direction and move towards it, constantly improving over a prolonged period of time. Maximum speed and output requires a precise framework. People who have made genuine changes in their lives and managed to attain difficult goals are not stronger, more intelligent or fearless

than you. The only difference is the decision to act in the direction of their dreams. A strong sense of purpose fuels your motivation.

Successful people have a definite sense of direction. They have a clear understanding of what success means to them. Everything they do is consistent with their goals. They look forward and decide where they want to be. Their day to day actions helps them move closer to their vision. Once you find your why, you will be more careful and selective about your daily actions. In here book, "*Brave: 50 Everyday Acts of Courage to Thrive in Work, Love and Life*", Margie Warrell, writes: "Knowing your why is an important first step in figuring out how to achieve the goals that excite you and create a life you enjoy living (versus merely surviving!). Margie continues "Indeed, only when you know your 'why' will you find the courage to take the risks needed to get ahead, stay motivated when the chips are down, and move your life onto an entirely new, more challenging, and more rewarding trajectory."

Clarity changes everything. Clarity of purpose challenges you to do better and commit to actions that get you closer to the one thing you really want in life. With clarity, you can pull together resources, ideas and people for a common cause. Without it, there is wasted effort and even chaos. Your direction defines what you do every day. Clarifying not only your purpose but your direction reinforces your ultimate life purpose. You should have a clear understanding of what you want next month, next quarter or next year. Think about it: When you feel unclear about a goal, you have difficulty achieving it. And if you don't know why you should do something, you lack commitment to taking action.

Bud Bilanich, an executive coach says to develop your personal clarity of purpose you need to do three things: First, define what success means to you personally. Second, create a vivid mental image of you as a success. This image should be as vivid as you can make it. Third, clarify your personal values. Getting clear about what you want is a

process of trial and error! Try something. Then ask yourself: Do I like this? Yes. No. Get a journal and start putting down your feelings, thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Use what you write as a way to pinpoint areas you are constantly exploring. Evaluate your results constantly. What actions, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors are you attracted to the most?

The key is to do more of what you enjoy and brings out the very best in you and you will continually clarify what it is that you want to do, be and have in life. Napoleon Hill once said “There is one quality that one must possess to win, and that is definiteness of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants, and a burning desire to possess it.

People who are constantly striving to achieve something meaningful in life crave clarity. It's the only way to reach deeper into yourself to find out what makes you come alive. We all start from somewhere confusing, because you probably like to do a lot of things. But once you define your purpose, you will become unstoppable. Successful people have a definite sense of direction. They have a clear understanding of what success means to them. Everything they do is consistent with their goals. They look forward and decide where they want to be. Their day to day actions help them move closer to their vision. Once you find your why, you will be more careful and selective about your daily actions. In the words of Margie Warrell, Author of *“Brave”*: “Knowing your why is an important first step in figuring out how to achieve the goals that excite you and create a life you enjoy living (versus merely surviving!). Indeed, only when you know your ‘why’ will you find the courage to take the risks needed to get ahead, stay motivated when the chips are down, and move your life onto an entirely new, more challenging, and more rewarding trajectory.”

Developing a personal life philosophy can be a deeply rewarding life experience. It can help you understand who you are and make sense of your life. A strategy for living is important, but it shouldn't feel like a burden. Philosophy of life (personal life rules) is a

collection of meaning from your life's experiences. Enjoy the process of refining what's important to you in life. As Seneca said: "As long as you live, keep learning how to live."

Key takeaway. If you've been following along, you've probably done a lot of critical thinking by now. Hopefully you've reached a new level of self-awareness. I would suggest taking some time in a quiet place to think about where you are headed in life. Are you happy with the direction of your life at the moment? What rules do you want to guide and shape your life? The good news is, it's never too late to change direction because you are in control. Reevaluate how you're doing with living according to your core beliefs, principles and philosophies. "The unexamined life is not worth living." Socrates said that. Adjust your goals and parameters so they're up-to-date and in the direction of your dreams. Never be afraid of questioning everything once again.

The Planning Fallacy: Why You Miss Your Deadlines, And What to do About it

How often do you find yourself racing at the last minute to finish a task? If you've ever missed a deadline the planning fallacy may well be the culprit. Most people are more conscious about time and how they use it. They have a better awareness of how much of it they will spend on impending tasks. Others are very prone to be optimistic when 'budgeting' it. They display an optimism bias and underestimate the time needed for every task for the day. This is a common pitfall when managing time, called 'the planning fallacy'. We consistently underestimate how long it will take to write a post, an ebook, record podcasts, complete a side project, or hold a meeting.

The planning fallacy was first proposed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky in 1979. This phenomenon can occur regardless of your knowledge that past tasks of a similar nature have taken longer to complete than generally planned. "The more steps

you have in whatever project or task you're working on, the greater the chance that in one of those steps you're going to hit a snag and it's going to turn out to be atypical," writes Julia Galef of *Big Think*. Planning fallacy is one of the most common and consistently demonstrated cognitive biases. For example, a house can only be built on time if there are no delivery delays, no employee absences, no hazardous weather conditions, etc. Even if each hurdle is unlikely, there is a high probability that at least one will occur. In every project, people rarely consider the what ifs, which is why they underestimate their task completion times. The good news is that being aware of how cognitive biases affect you can help you be on the lookout for them, and change your behaviour to compensate.

Resist the tyranny of the urgent. According to research, bite-sized tasks and interruptions can disrupt concentration for up to half an hour. Urgency wrecks productivity. Your ability to distinguish urgent and important tasks has a lot to do with your success. Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important." Urgent tasks require your immediate attention: phone calls, meetings, tasks with tight deadlines, and other issues that require you to take action quickly. Important tasks help advance long-term goals and complete serious projects. They are tasks that actually push the needle.

But unfortunately, we tend to put important tasks aside and deal with the urgent tasks that provide a rapid sense of accomplishment but don't help advance long-term goals. Kat Boogaard of Trello explains, "Our brains have the not-so-helpful tendency to conflate real, productive work with those other small, menial, and mindless tasks. By totally pushing those out of your mind (and off your to-do list) for now, you won't be tempted to color code your inbox when you should actually be completing that presentation that's due in two hours." Learn to limit the amount of time you're wasting on non-urgent/non-important tasks. The fundamental approach to solving this vicious circle of work is to understand the difference between urgent tasks and important tasks.

Break big tasks into smaller pieces. The more steps your task or project involves, the more opportunities there are for something to go wrong. When you are making predictions, pay attention to the steps you need to take, and not just the outcome. People who procrastinate often feel overwhelmed and the task seems insurmountable. By breaking a bigger project into smaller tasks, the work is more manageable and less intimidating. Think of each component that is involved in the process, and allocate time for it to be completed. Examine the parts of any task, and figure out step-by-step what you need to do to get it done. Create a timeline for completing your tasks. Having a deadline will make you more focused for each task. Give yourself 30 minutes to complete something or an hour. If the task is too large to complete in an hour, break it into smaller tasks, and time box those smaller tasks. To help you stick with your new work hours, set appointments for 30 minutes after you're supposed to get off work. So if you tell yourself you're absolutely going to leave work at 5 p.m. (or even better, at 3 p.m.), set an appointment for 5:30 p.m. and stick to it.

Set a hard deadline. Set a specific goal for the end of that length of time, and set it in stone. If you set a tighter deadline for each of your tasks today, you'll be inspired to find the most productive way to meet those deadlines and get your work done. Make a list of the tasks you need to accomplish by close of day today. Then, think about how much time it will take to accomplish each of those tasks. Once you begin your work, you'll find you're in a race against the clock. That's exactly what you want because it will inspire you to get it done. When you're done, take a look back and see how you've fared. Measure your progress and improve accordingly.

Did you inflate the time required for some tasks? There may be some tasks that you simply can't cut hours on or some that you can cut even more time from. Adjust your schedule to work better, faster and smarter. Use the Pomodoro technique. Begin tracking your time to get a more realistic handle on how long specific projects and tasks

take you. That can easily override your optimism bias and keep your expectations in check. The Pomodoro technique teaches us to work with time, instead of struggling against it. It can help you power through distractions and get things done in short bursts. The Pomodoro Technique, strictly about time-management, was developed by Italian entrepreneur Francesco Cirillo.

He created this simple study habit (when he was still a college student in the late 1980s) to maximize his productivity and reduce a feeling of burnout. It focuses on working in short, intensely focused bursts (20/30/40 minutes), and then giving yourself a brief break to recover and start over. The technique requires a timer, and it allows you to break down your large complex tasks into manageable intervals. Once you start a task, you aim to finish it before attending to urgent but unimportant tasks.

Beware of “time bullies”. When you are on the clock or supposed to be working, your time is for your work. Protect it. Say no more often. “Saying “No” means you have time to focus on your own creation, tasks and projects, rather than responding and reacting to requests. In the words of Paulo Coelho: “When you say YES to others, make sure you are not saying NO to yourself.” Don’t get suckered into tasks you don’t have time for. Saying No is hard, but it means you say Yes to focus and sanity. Use your power of choice to say “Yes” or “No” when you mean it.

Key takeaway. Falling into the planning fallacy can make you feel overloaded. If you are able to recognize and address this issue before it gets out of hand, you will be less likely to allow it to impact your success. Human judgment sucks. Don’t rely on your personal, subjective judgment of how long something is likely to take or how involved it will be because that’s likely to suck. Measure and compare. How well did past projects performed in terms of their PLAN versus the ACTUAL time it took to complete? What went well? What didn’t go so well? What can you do differently next time? Rely on evidence. Track your progress and base your decisions on past evidence.

How to Hit Reset on Your Life

You're convinced that something must change, whether in your work or personal life. But you are struggling to figure it out. Sometimes an area of your life — or perhaps more than one — has gone completely off track and you feel like you can't move forward. The power of resetting is that at any given moment in life, you truly can reset yourself, career, or relationship. You give yourself an entirely fresh start, a clean slate to begin your efforts anew; it completely clears your mind of all the unfinished to-dos, burdensome distractions, and nagging questions in life. If predictable patterns in your life are not given you the results you seek, change course. Don't do what you've always done.

Switch off the usual suspects and embrace a new challenge. The golden opportunity to change is now. Hit reset. Start over. Start a new chapter. The essence of life is living it to the fullest. Are you living a meaningful life right now? A reset is your personal empowerment "button" — accessible anytime you desire change. A reset allows you to make improvements in your daily life in any shape or form you choose, at a pace you can comfortably commit to. Hitting the reset button is the only way to avoid hitting a permanent wall.

When life is audited, performance improves. You are probably due a life audit. Do some introspection. What is the most interesting /important thing to you right now? Are you working towards that? Reexamine your goals in life as needed, and refocus where necessary. Add a recurring weekly/monthly audit to your calendar, and start reflecting on your weekly actions. Ask yourself these questions: What went right? Wrong? What can I do better? You don't even have to spend an hour auditing yourself. You can quickly assess how you performed each week or month, with questions like:

How is this helping me achieve my goals? What am I gaining by having this on my to-do list? Could I achieve the same gains another way? What would I lose by taking this off my list? Do those things play a large role in me achieving my long-term goal? Did I consume more than I created? How about my time management? How did my screen time affect my productivity? If you are future-focused, this is a helpful reminder to look back, even for a few minutes, and think about how far you've come and what you need to do to be better, and smarter in the future.

Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping. It's a better approach to redefine personal progress. Auditing yourself can help you sustain a ruthless level of prioritisation. It's a practical way to achieve meaningful progress. Tracking improves everything. Analysis of work and life brings ideas for progress. Many people are held back because they simply don't know how to improve. They aren't tracking their life enough! The more you track, the more you know about your situation, your behaviour, and your projected future. You can even track bad behaviours, and habits. An unhealthy behaviour is something that, if unchecked, could possibly spiral out of control and negatively affect your life or derail your purpose and plans.

Do you feel stuck? Alistair Smith once said, "Getting stuck is not a problem. Staying stuck is. Good learners practice getting unstuck," Many people want something better for their lives, but they don't know where to start. Others have done amazing things in the past, they are struggling in the present to be awesome again. The good news is, it's just a feeling, when you start to make positive movements forward, the feeling will change. When you are stuck, Bruce Chant recommends that you ask yourself three important questions to recalibrate and get moving in the right direction again. Those three questions are: What do you want? Name it. Define it. Call it out. What is stopping you? A belief or mindset. Fear. An excuse. What do you need to do to obtain it? Now you can work to address the issue, but do so by starting small.

Accept the past and keep moving. Brian Tracy once said, "It doesn't matter where you are coming from. All that matters is where you are going." Yes, you may not be happy about your past. But remember, failure is not final or fatal. It's the willingness to keep moving that matters. Bad memories will come back. Instead of dwelling on them and relieving the situation, try to accept it, and focus on the future. Hack away the unessential. Is there anything that takes up a lot of your time and energy but you don't really enjoy doing it? Sometimes you feel stuck because there are too many things that do not advance your long-term goals. Create a short list of these things and eliminate them from your life ASAP. You'll feel much lighter and you'll be able to concentrate on what's really important. If you plan to start afresh it's good to declutter your life completely.

Define new goals and purpose. When you lose your purpose, when you become stuck, you signal to your brain and body that you have no reason to live. When you no longer challenge yourself mentally or physically, deterioration will set in. You start to decay. Only by continually challenging yourself will you keep both your body and mind sharp. In his book, *What They Don't Teach You in the Harvard Business School*, author Mark McCormack tells a study about the students in the 1979 MBA program. The graduate students were asked if they had set clear written goals for their future and made plans to accomplish them. 13% had goals but didn't write them down. 3% had written them down. 84% had no goals. 10 years later, the graduates were interviewed again. The 13% who had goals were earning an average of twice as much as the 84% who had no goals. The 3% who had clearly defined and written their goals, were earning an average of 10 times their classmates.

Clearly, setting goals is powerful. Plan your life out. Thinking about your future isn't nearly as effective as writing down your goals. You can only witness change and

progress by defining a strong purpose for your life and working effortlessly to achieve it. Without concrete, measurable, and achievable goals and a working system to help you reach your goals, your days lose their flavour and life becomes boring. You've got to have excitement for the future to do something worthwhile with your life and career.

Change course, starting today. Changing course can be challenging, but what makes it exciting is the restoration of hope. Give yourself a new and significant challenge. To get that momentum back, give yourself something to pursue and find an accountability partner to help you take actionable steps. Your pursuit should be meaningful to you. Why you pursue something is equally as important as what you pursue. Start something greater than yourself. Something you truly believe in. Just doing something different can boost your mood, change your perspective and give you a sense of optimism to move forward. Pursue something that brings out the best in you. That way you will enjoy the journey and the process. Move beyond mere talk and commit to specific actions that will move your goals forward.

Take the easiest step you can imagine to change course! Once you start moving, you'll feel unbelievably better. You'll feel the power of motion, you'll feel the rut moving behind you. That one step — it's all it takes to start moving and creating again. You don't have to be stuck. You can choose to take action today to move yourself forward, making progress towards your ultimate goal in life. Know what you want, discern what's stopping you, and take the next smallest step to get there. Choose to make your life better, even when you are not stuck! If you want to make big changes, meaningful changes, don't wait for a perfect day. You have the power to hit the reset button on your life.

Don't wait for the first of January every year. Life has a reset button, but it's up to you to push it. Any. Time. You. Want. It's never too late for a do over. Hit that reset button and never look back.

How to Use The Law of Homogeneous Sequences to Increase The Return on Your Time

Today, right now, you can push your productivity into overdrive. And that means protecting your time and focusing on the essentials, with no room for interruptions and distractions. Human beings are, essentially, single-core processors. Once you start juggling tasks, you divide your attention, concentration, focus, and in the end, everything suffers. And guess what, you increase the time spent refocusing on important tasks. To do your best work, you need to be able to focus at will, and overcome constant interruptions. Yet, only few people really understand just how bad the interruption issue is.

The law of homogeneous sequences. Carson's Law, also known as Law of homogeneous sequences states that a task completed in one single stretch will actually be completed much faster than doing that same task in multiple attempts or multiple goals. The law was named after Swedish researcher who theorised back in the 1950s that it takes less time and energy to complete a task in one go than it does if you continuously stop and start. Or put another way, once you start doing something you must finish it (or at least you shouldn't start until you have everything you need to accomplish it). A task started should always be finished before moving on to the next one. The benefits of single tasking cannot be overemphasised. Alternating between tasks gives the illusion of productivity.

When you are responding to a multitude of demands, you think you are making progress, but in actual fact, you are moving tasks at a snail pace. Any interruption (work-related or not) introduces a change in work pattern. In a study, "The Cost of Interrupted Work: More Speed and Stress" Gloria Mark, Daniela Gudith and Ulrich

Klocke concluded that, "...interruptions lead people to change not only work rhythms but also strategies and mental states." It's like switching rungs on a ladder, you lose your momentum if you keep going up and down instead of taking more steps and getting to the top. Interrupting a task once you've reached your maximum productivity phase implies you'll have to go back to the beginning, thus waste time, energy and efficiency.

Distraction is the enemy! "If you see distraction externally, you end up creating an internally distracted state, says Tim Ferriss. Demand for our time is increasingly exceeding our capacity — draining us of the energy we need to bring our skill and talent fully to life. We are currently exposed to an unprecedented flood of information and requests than ever before. And we feel compelled to read and respond at all hours of the day and night. Being selective, doing less, is the path of the productive. It pays to focus on the important few and ignore the rest. "The net is designed to be an interruption system, a machine geared for dividing attention," Nicholas Carr explains in his book *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. "We willingly accept the loss of concentration and focus, the division of our attention and the fragmentation of our thoughts, in return for the wealth of compelling or at least diverting information we receive."

Learn to transition between tasks. In order to stay focused for longer periods, it is advisable to organise sequences of interconnected tasks. "We have to proactively manage the way we transition between tasks to help our attention be more focused and less distracted or divided among everything we have on our plate," says Sophie Leroy from the University of Washington Bothell School of Business. "The ready-to-resume plan is one simple way to help when dealing with frequent interruptions," she adds. If we do similar things like, for example, checking our backlog of emails, we'll stay highly focused. Alternating between tasks also diminishes your intellectual capacity. Many experts are also telling us that these interruptions and distractions have eroded our ability to concentrate. "In 2005, research carried out by Dr Glenn Wilson at London's

Institute of Psychiatry found that persistent interruptions and distractions at work had a profound effect. Those distracted by emails and phone calls saw a 10-point fall in their IQ, writes Harriet Griffey of The Guardian.

Don't take the mental cost of switching from one task to another lightly. Many experts advise their audience to get rid of notifications, or use noise cancelling headphones so they can get in the zone and don't get bothered by audio cues or visual cues visual distractions. If you take Carlson's Law into account when planning your work, not only will you optimise time, but also efficiency and productivity. Emails, tweets, status updates, phone calls, text and meetings are just some of the known intrusions that occur all day every day. You can't ignore them, but you can plan your work schedule so that you deal with them in a way that retains your productivity.

Use the 90 minutes cycle to your advantage. The human body operates on cycles called "ultradian rhythms." According to research, during each of these cycles, there is a peak when we are most energised and a period when we are exhausted. Your brain can only focus for 90 to 120 minutes at a time. Afterwards, a 20–30 minute break is required for you to get the renewal to achieve high performance for your next task again, according to research. During a productive sprint, you focus only on one task at a time and avoid distractions. Each sprint has a specific goal, and the end of the sprint signals a break to relax and set up for the next sprint.

Reset your brain for peak performance. Studies are showing that taking time for silence restores the nervous system, helps sustain energy, and conditions our minds to be more adaptive and responsive. It pays to go on a media fast. Turn off your email for a few hours or even a full day if you can, or try "fasting" from news, entertainment and all distractions that prevent you from taking advantage of regular breaks. It's only when you come to appreciate and accept the ebbs and flows of your body that you can really start to deliver maximum results. The world is getting louder. Distractions are inevitable. But

silence is still accessible if you plan for it and stick to it. Take a break for greater concentration. All the little tasks and decisions you have to make every day as you work gradually deplete your psychological resources. Taking a break (even for 15 to 20 minutes) is a proven way to sustain concentration and energy levels throughout the day.

Taking breaks is biologically restorative. Daniel J. Levitin of McGill University once wrote about the importance of resetting your brain every now and then. “If you want to be more productive and creative, and to have more energy, science dictates that you should partition your day into project periods” says Daniel. He explains: If you’re feeling overwhelmed, there’s a reason: The processing capacity of the conscious mind is limited. This is a result of how the brain’s attentional system evolved.

Our brains have two dominant modes of attention: the task-positive network and the task-negative network (they’re called networks because they comprise distributed networks of neurons, like electrical circuits within the brain). The task-positive network is active when you’re actively engaged in a task, focused on it, and undistracted; neuroscientists have taken to calling it the central executive. The task-negative network is active when your mind is wandering; this is the daydreaming mode. These two attentional networks operate like a seesaw in the brain: when one is active the other is not. The human brain just wasn’t built for the extended focus we ask of it these days. The good news is that there is a fix to get back on track—all you need is a brief interruption (aka a break) to get back on track. Harvard Business Review examines another important benefit of scheduling breaks on purpose. They allow you to reset and refocus on the right things

When you work on a task continuously, it’s easy to lose focus and get lost in the weeds. In contrast, following a brief intermission, picking up where you left off forces you to take a few seconds to think globally about what you’re ultimately trying to achieve. It’s a practice that encourages us to stay mindful of our objectives... Short breaks will reduce

your stress and re-energise your up time, increasing your creativity, productivity and enthusiasm. Breaks give you the much needed time to rest your eyes, move around, stretch your stiff muscles, get more blood and oxygen flowing to your brain, to refresh and obtain a fresh outlook on problems that need fresh perspective.

The Optionality Trap (The Risk Not Taken)

The primary essence of optionality is the ability to exercise the most favourable option that will advance your goals without predictable knowledge that would allow you to make an informed decision. Optionality is an idea advanced by Nassim Taleb in his book *Antifragile*. Optionality is a popular concept in the finance world. “When you hold an option and the world moves with you, you enjoy the benefits; when the world moves against you, you are shielded from the bad outcome since you are not obligated to do anything. Optionality is the state of enjoying possibilities without being on the hook to do anything,” writes Mihir A. Desai.

People in finance love collecting options, especially low-cost options. Every option has a cost associated with it though. Preserving optionality means waiting as long as possible to make a decision. Life is ultimately about choices: what you choose to do and as a result, what you choose not to do. If you are choosing amongst options that are relatively inexpensive, or without high life-changing costs, you can benefit from the theory of options. In the words of Nassim Taleb: Options, any options, by allowing you more upside than downside, are vectors of antifragility. If you “have optionality,” you don’t have much need for what is commonly called intelligence, knowledge, insight, skills, and these complicated things that take place in our brain cells. For you don’t have to be right that often. All you need is the wisdom to not do unintelligent things to hurt

yourself (some acts of omission) and recognize favorable outcomes when they occur. (The key is that your assessment doesn't need to be made beforehand, only after the outcome.).

Option = asymmetry + rationality. The mechanism of optionlike trial and error (the fail-fast model), a.k.a. convex tinkering. Low-cost mistakes, with known maximum losses, and large potential payoff (unbounded). A central feature of positive Black Swans. Taleb argues that prediction is impossible in the modern world is impossible, hence the need to maximise optionality. Instead of trying to predict what is going to happen, position yourself in such a way that you have optionality. But for anything to qualify as an option, it must have limited downside with large, open-ended upside.

Beware of the optionality trap. "Keep your options open" is the advice offered to many of us at different stages of our lives. "While this advice isn't necessarily wrong, very rarely do we take a step back and examine what exactly we're collecting all these options for," explains Neil Soni. In many situations, "You can't steal second base and keep your foot on first." If applied in many life situations, the optionality maximisation mindset can turn into habitual option collection habits and prevent you from making a decision, taking a step, or advancing your goals. "Once we've committed to a course of action, we stop thinking about alternatives. Or, if we do bother to think about them, we think about how lousy they are compared to our clearly superior and awesome choice", says Heidi Grant Halvorson.

The idea of creating optionality without any obligations can backfire in surprising ways in life and career. "You can never create enough option value — and the longer you spend acquiring options, the harder it is to stop," says Mihir. Acquiring safety net upon safety net can lead to hesitation, procrastination, and indecision. When a temporary destination becomes an end in itself, you stop growing, learning, and improving. Many

people consistently hedge their bets not only in their careers, but in business, and relationships. Vivek Gambhir says, "...optionality isn't restricted to the professional domain alone — it is also applied in areas like love (avoiding an emotional commitment because there may be someone better out there), friendship (having superficial equations with lots of people for fear of losing out socially), and hobbies (refusing to throw yourself wholeheartedly into something because that would require saying no to other possibilities).

Millions of people postpone their dreams and undertake choices that they think will enable their dreams but end up in soul-crushing environments. If your dreams are apparent to you, pursue them. Creating optionality can be a dangerous diversion that will keep you from taking an important leap in life. Quoting Neil Soni again: "The optionality trap is something that ensnares us, not through outside forces, but through our own risk aversion and indecisiveness."

Key takeaway. Optionality is a means, not an end. Holding on can do more harm than good. Never messing up might make you feel "safe", but it also keeps you from course-correcting and leading a richer, more authentic life. Andy Dunn explains: The risk is not in doing something that feels risky. The risk is in not doing something that feels risky. Very little is obvious in the research on human decision-making and happiness. Very few things are proven. One thing that is proven is this: the only regrets octogenarians have are for the risks not taken. Here's why: If the risk taken does pan out, it is good. But if it doesn't — and here's the key thing — we find a way to justify the risk taken as learning. Taking steps, learning, relearning, and taking more steps is the only way to grow and make progress. When you choose a path, things start to happen. You make progress, real progress. You cannot predict an outcome in advance, but taking a calculated step is the only way to move forward.

“If you can’t decide what to do, get on the road. You won’t find the answer. It will find you,” says Dunn. Never miss an opportunity to advance your career in the direction of your dreams. It’s good to create options and explore possibilities — but not when it becomes a way of life rather than a means for achieving your goals in life.

How to To Immediately Make Your Day More Productive

Waking up early has immense value for millions of people. Adding those extra hours to the day when no one else is up allows you to get a head-start and work on your most important tasks. Early risers get a lot of good press. They are supposedly more productive and effective and efficient. There are countless articles about the morning habits of the world’s most successful leaders. Apple CEO Tim Cook apparently wakes up at 3.45am. Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne at 3:30am. Vogue editor Anna Wintour gets out of bed to play tennis at 5.45am. Richard Branson has said he rises at the same time. And Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz reportedly gets up at 4.30am. “Numerous studies have found that morning people are more persistent, self-directed and agreeable. They set higher goals for themselves, plan for the future more and have a better sense of well-being,” writes Amanda Ruggeri of BBC Capital.

Many successful people have been promoting getting up early and working at the crack of dawn, while it is actually more important to recognize what works for you and optimize workflow accordingly. Myth: early riser = more productive. More hours does not equal more/better work. Waking up at an unnatural time for you can cause sleep deprivation if your body can’t handle it. When you are tired, you lose productivity. You become more irritable and are less functional. For those that are biologically predetermined early risers, waking up at 5 AM may be natural and helpful. However, for

those on a different body cycle, trying to change it, though not impossible, can make you unproductive. In the long-term, it could negatively disrupt your biological sleep cycle and decrease happiness — without making you more efficient or giving anything truly valuable in return.

Rising early can be great when it works for you. Some early risers might get more done, but it turns out there are times when getting up earlier can make you less productive. But here is the thing: Everyone has different peak hours. And our biological clocks are different. Your body clock, or circadian rhythm, governs how your body is in sync with all of life. Your rhythm is different from mine. And what works for Tim Cook may not necessarily work for you. “If people are left to their naturally preferred times, they feel much better. They say that they are much more productive. The mental capacity they have is much broader,” says Oxford University biologist Katharina Wulff, who studies chronobiology and sleep.

The best productivity hack is just listening to your own body and working with it, not against it. Brian Tracy calls this your prime time. “Your internal prime time is the time of day, according to your body clock, when you are the most alert and productive.” The single most important productivity advice you need to follow is this: Match your highest priority work to your most productive hours. The basic idea here is to track your energy, motivation and focus to get a sense of when, where, and how you’re the most productive.

Yulia Yaganova recommends at least a three-week experiment where you rate your energy, focus and motivation at the end of every hour, using a scale from one to 10 to find out your peak times. The growing body of research on ultradian rhythms suggests that our day is driven by cycles that affect how alert and productive we are. The results of this research clearly show that the human body goes through cycles of between 90

and 120 minutes. Through each of these cycles we are taken from an unproductive trough to a productive peak, and then back again.

This pattern was first noticed by sleep researcher Nathaniel Kleitman, which caused a mountain of research to be conducted in this area. Another study published in *Thinking & Reasoning* found out that we tend to think more creatively when we're tired. A study by Mareike Wieth and Rose Zacks suggested that innovation and creativity are often the greatest in moments of fatigue, based on our circadian rhythms. Fatigue and tiredness have been shown to free up thinking along non-linear paths, leading us to find new solutions to existing problems. So your body's internal body clock is the best clue to how productive you can be. Start and stick to a routine that brings out the best in you!

Tap your energy cycle. Our body clock is a small group of cells made up of unique 'body clock' genes. These cells turn on and off and tell other parts of the body what time it is and what to do. A growing body of research suggests that paying attention to the body clock, and its effects on energy and alertness, can help pinpoint the different times of day when most of us perform our best at specific tasks. At the beginning of the cycle, we experience heightened energy and focus, and at the end, we may feel scatterbrained and fatigued.

For many people working in the AM feels effortless, but the PM's are always a struggle. If you take note of how your body reacts to work at any time of day, you will be able to figure out when you should focus on getting stuff done, when to brainstorm, and most importantly when you should avoid meetings. When the body's master clock can synchronize functioning of all its metabolic, cardiovascular and behavioural rhythms in response to light and other natural stimuli, it "gives us an edge in daily life," says Steve Kay, a professor of molecular and computational biology at the University of Southern California. But, what is the best day for you (or your team) to be productive?

Peak productivity, it seems, happens at the same time during your workday, no matter where you are in the world. A two-year global study conducted by project management software company Redbooth found that productivity among office workers worldwide is at its highest point at 11 a.m., and plummets completely after 4 p.m. John Trougakos, an associate professor of organizational behaviour at the University of Toronto in Canada, says the reason we're most productive in the morning is down to circadian rhythms, or our internal body clock, which tells our bodies when to get up, eat, and sleep through out 24-hour cycles. According to Trougakos, about 75% of people tend to be most mentally alert between 9 a.m and 11 a.m.

And a survey that looked into the habits of 2,000 UK workers seems to agree with Trougakos' research, showing Tuesday morning as the most productive time for Brits. The findings "are consistent with considerable research on the ebbs and flows of mental acuity," says Don Drummond, economist and adjunct professor at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Perhaps it's no surprise that we get the least amount of work done on a Friday, with Redbooth's survey showing a 20% drop in productivity across the globe.

Sleepiness also tends to peak around 2 p.m., making that a good time for a nap, says Martin Moore-Ede, chairman and chief executive of Circadian, a Stoneham, Mass., training and consulting firm. To get a little more precise and make sure you're really matching your best work to your peak times, try experimenting. Tackle complex projects early in the day, make time for brainstorming, meetings and collaboration in the afternoon. Most people are more easily distracted from noon to 4 p.m., according to recent research led by Robert Matchock, an associate professor of psychology at Pennsylvania State University.

But guess what, surprisingly, fatigue boosts creative powers. Problems that require open-ended thinking are often best tackled in the evening when you are tired, according

to a study in the journal *Thinking & Reasoning*. People who work with instead of against their ultradian rhythm perform better. It's critical that you acknowledge your body's natural rhythms and align your periods of work and relaxation with them to work in a sustainable productive way. It requires a lot of research on yourself and a big time commitment up front, but the personal productivity insights you'll get out of it can pay off in the long-run. This simple method can help you organize your days around your energy, not your time. The experiment for better cycle insights

1. Pick a day and start tracking how you spend it.
2. Eliminate any factors that could mess with your energy — changes in caffeine intake is a big one, staying up late is another.
3. Start recording what you're accomplishing once an hour. Rate your energy level, motivation, focus in the process of work, every day.
4. Chris Bailey, author of "The Productivity Project: Accomplishing More by Managing Your Time, Attention, and Energy", took a year off to experiment with productivity. He suggests recording scores for focus, energy, and motivation for three weeks, at the same time each day, to find your sweet spot. The longer you track your productivity, the more reliable your insights will be.

You will see trends even after one week of tracking, but the more data you gather, the more reliable your trends will be.

5. Take a few minutes each day to reflect on your previous day/week. Do you notice any patterns? When are you most focused? When do you notice a surge or dip in energy?

What times do you reach for coffee in the day? These patterns can reveal when you're at your best and when you should take a break to refresh.

6. Write down how you spend your minutes and keep notes on how you felt. Be honest. Sometimes you can identify that you feel “on a roll,” which is a good sign that you’re figuring out something about your productivity.

7. The exact details that you record may vary, but to get the most accurate results you’ll need to be as consistent as possible.

Patterns will show themselves if you start tracking it. Time and activity tracking software like Rescue Time and Toggl can be a big help here.

8. You’re bound to discover some very interesting things about what drives your productivity. If you can diligently track all three weeks, you’ll come out the other side a productivity superhero.

9. Try a combination of things during this process, including waking up an hour earlier, meditating, exercise, and taking longer breaks to find out if they affect your peak times. Do more of what works. The variables you choose to alter are countless. Have fun with it!

10. Once you figure out your most productive time of day, rearrange your tasks and put your important, high-concentration tasks in periods where you’re highly productive and place less important, low-concentration tasks in periods where you’re not very productive.

I did this experiment for three months. I started this practice because I discovered my energy and capacity for intense deep work diminish as the day wears on.

From waking up between 7am and 8am, my energy levels quickly spiked, gradually dipping between 12pm and 2pm.

Key takeaway. Don't limit yourself to a single productivity rule. Experiment and find out what works for you, and give you the greatest return for your time, energy, and attention. Productivity tools and techniques need to be custom fit not only to YOU but also to your SITUATION. It's okay to skip conventional productivity wisdom if something else works better for you. Getting proper sleep is more important than religiously waking up at the crack of dawn if you can't make the most of it. Giving yourself an extra hour in the day isn't enough, it's what you do with it that matters. You can get things done if you start your day on purpose and plan well in advance, but being an early bird is not for everyone. And, if you are more productive at a late hour, that should be your priority.

Managing Time, Energy, And Attention

The quest for increased personal productivity — for making the best possible use of your limited time can be overwhelming. And sometimes the better you get at managing time, the less of it you feel that you have. Here is a familiar story: You're busy all day reacting to people's requests, working non-stop and against the clock, multitasking in an attempt to get all your tasks done, and checked off from your to-do list. As the day comes to a close, you have little to show for all the time, effort and energy you have put into your day's work. You shouldn't live and work like that. The good news is, you can take control and start accomplishing almost everything you set out to do on any given day. Don't allow these habits to deny you a great day at work!

How do you spend your time? "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives," says Annie Dillard. Time. It is arguably your most valuable asset. We often

overlook certain routines which leads to lost productivity. You probably have no idea how much time you spend on a single task every day. It's very easy to forget to track how you work. You will be shocked by how much time you're actually wasting on tasks that have little or no value to your life and work. You can take complete control of your time if you can be mindful of what kind of time you're taking and what you are spending it on. It pays to single-task! Cut, outsource, or delegate anything else that's in the way. Stop trying to do everything!

When you're focused on one thing at a time, accomplishing it, then moving on, you can easily track how much time you spend on your daily activities. *The One Thing*, by Gary Keller encourages us to use the 'One Thing' approach to take control of our time. He writes: "If everyone has the same number of hours in the day, why do some people seem to get so much more done than others? How do they do more, achieve more, earn more, have more? If time is the currency of achievement, then why are some able to cash in their allotment for more chips than others? The answer is they make getting to the heart of things the heart of their approach. They go small. Going small is ignoring all the things you could do and doing what you should do. It's recognizing that not all things matter equally and finding the things that matter most. It's a tighter way to connect what you do with what you want. It's realizing that extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus."

Be proactive about managing your inbox. Many people get into bad habits with email: they check their messages every few minutes, read them and most of the time, the messages they read stress them out which impacts how they work. What's even worse is that they take little or no action, so they pile up into an even more stress-inducing heap. Over-reliance on email to collaborate with your team is costing you precious time and money. Email is probably contributing to more task switching than you realise.

An inbox that is overflowing with actions, urgent calls for responses, stuff to read, etc. is chaotic, stressful, and overwhelming. Here is a better way to handle your email: When you open an email, make a quick decision: delete/archive, or act now. Clarify the action each message requires — a reply, an entry on your to-do list, or just filing it away. If a reply will take less than a minute, go ahead and respond. Otherwise schedule a time to clear your inbox.

Stop sending so many emails. The more emails you send, the more you'll get. Use email as little as you possibly can. Use alternatives if possible. If you send an email that doesn't require a response, say so. Send shorter emails. They're more likely to get read and acted on, and it'll take less of your time to write them. Try sticking to 4 sentences or fewer. Are your goals specific, attainable, measurable and time-bound? "Write your goals down in detail and read your list of goals every day. Some goals may entail a list of shorter goals. Losing a lot of weight, for example, should include mini-goals, such as 10-pound milestones. This will keep your subconscious mind focused on what you want step by step, " says Jack Canfield.

Goal setting is one of the most fundamental rules of productivity. Goals set the direction and determine where you go. James Clear explains: Research has shown that you are 2x to 3x more likely to stick to your goals if you make a specific plan for when, where, and how you will perform the behavior. For example, in one study scientists asked people to fill out this sentence: "During the next week, I will partake in at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise on [DAY] at [TIME OF DAY] at/in [PLACE]." Researchers found that people who filled out this sentence were 2x to 3x more likely to actually exercise compared to a control group who did not make plans for their future behavior. Psychologists call these specific plans "implementation intentions" because they state when, where, and how you intend to implement a particular behavior.

You need clarity of purpose to be productive! The best approach for setting and achieving your goals is not to have too many goals at a time. Having too many goals makes things complicated and requires a more complicated system for keeping track of your goals. Keep things as simple as possible if you can. That has the added benefit of allowing you to focus your energies on a small number of goals, making you far more effective with them. Set goals, especially for the most important areas of your life: career, relationships, finance, health, and personal growth. Where do you see yourself in these areas in the next six months, or one, three, and five years? Your goals directly impact your actions which impact your results!

Measure your inputs or results! Don't measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but by what you should have accomplished with your ability, John Wooden says. If you don't take time to assess results and figure out how to do more of what's working, you will be wasting a lot of time on activities that have little impact on your productivity. Examine your work constantly. Meticulously analyze your inputs and outputs. The overwhelming reality about life and living it is this: we live in a world where a lot of things are taking up your most time but given you the least results and a very few things are exceptionally valuable. John Maxwell once said, "You cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything. Time your efforts, and document how you are investing your time. Are you getting the results you expect? This might seem like a waste of time at first, but once you see how valuable performance data is for getting better in life you'll start measuring where the week has gone.

Find a system that works for you. Try out different ways to organize your to-do list. Use apps. Use sticky notes. Larry Alton of The Muse recommends that you review your system constantly and revise where necessary. He writes: "To figure out if a new system's working, keep a productivity journal where you track what time of the day you worked best, what helped you get your various tasks done, and how you felt when you

left the office. As time goes on, you can look back, find patterns, and identify where improvements are needed. There are so many systems and apps out there, that there just has to be one for you.”

Actionable steps to measure how you spend time.

1. Assess your schedule for the rest of the week and write down how much time you are spending on social media, checking work and personal email, writing blogs, meetings, web browsing, news reading, etc.
2. Then, come up with a percentage of time spent on each activity given the number of hours you are “at work” per week.
3. Put the analysis together and you will very clearly see your problem areas.
4. You will then know exactly where you need to develop more efficient systems for yourself and areas to cut back so you can focus more on what contributes to your overall productivity.

To Make Better Decisions, Don’t Confuse Difficulty With Urgency

Decisions shape important outcomes, for better or worse. They are the most basic building blocks of life. Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and other experts have clarified the specific ways in which decision makers are likely to be biased. No amount of deliberation can ever guarantee that you have identified the “right” option.

The purpose of a decision is not to find the perfect option but get you an optimal choice that can help you get to the next one. Don’t confuse difficulty with urgency. When you

are overwhelmed by the urgency, magnitude, and complexity of a choice, you are likely to procrastinate or rush through it.

A smarter approach for making difficult decisions is to break down the process into manageable steps that you can tackle over time. Before you rush to make a call on a tough issue, gather the facts (for and against your current assumptions), give yourself time to think through your options (process what you've found), and then make the call. "In the end, if you don't give yourself the time you feel you need to make a judgment or choice, you will undermine your satisfaction and your subsequent experience. You will regret your decision, even when it is completely unwarranted, writes Heidi Halvorson is a motivational psychologist and author of *No One Understands You, and What To Do About It*. Don't panic in times of crisis, or when you think your career, life or business is on the line. Keep calm and think through your options. For many people though, impulsive decisions stem simply from getting caught up in what they want right now without thinking ahead, never thinking about the potential consequences or the long-term impact.

Take an outsider's perspective. Many judgment errors can be eliminated simply by broadening your frame of reference. The quickest, easiest, most effective way to do this is by involving someone who thinks very differently from you. It's amazing how many poor decisions can be avoided simply by asking one other person for their opinion.

A fresh perspective changes everything. An impressive amount of empirical research backs up his observation. Taking an outsider's perspective has been shown to reduce decision makers' overconfidence about their knowledge (Gigerenzer, Hoffrage, & Kleinbölting, 1991). Decision makers may also be able to improve their judgments by asking a genuine outsider for his or her view regarding the decision.. Searching for evidence that could prove you wrong is a painful process but it works. If you're wrestling

with a difficult decision, consult a friend or colleague who's been in your situation before. Their insight will likely be significantly more valuable than almost any research.

Choice overload is a trap. Too many choices exhaust us. And when you have too many scenarios to consider, you are likely to abscond from making a decision altogether. Researcher Barry Schwartz calls this "choice overload." We tend to avoid making important decisions when we have too many choices. "As the number of options increases, the costs, in time and effort, of gathering the information needed to make a good choice also increase," writes Schwartz. "The level of certainty people have about their choice decreases. And the anticipation that they will regret their choice increases," says Schwartz. When you reach that level of stress in a decision-making process, you procrastinate, overthink and delay important decisions. Jane Porter of Fast Company explains, "Given the endless options of which route to take, we can sometimes end up going with the more conventional path simply because it's the easier way to go." By all means, consider all your options, but narrow your most important options to help you make a better choice in the future. A study from New York University found that "restricting the choice of creative inputs actually enhances creativity."

Embrace the OODA loop. Military pilots are known to rely on the OODA cycle/loop (observe, orient, decide and act) when making decisions. The OODA loop was developed by military strategist and United States Air Force Colonel John Boyd. Boyd applied the concept to the combat operations process, often at the operational level during military campaigns. There is no rush. But every step is calculated based on careful observation. The OODA loop has become an important concept in litigation, business, law enforcement, and military strategy. Consider a fighter pilot being scrambled to shoot down an enemy aircraft. The pilot decides to "get into the sun" above his opponent, and acts by applying control inputs to climb.

Back to observation — is the attacker reacting to the change of altitude? Then comes orient: Is the enemy reacting characteristically, or perhaps acting like a noncombatant? Is his plane exhibiting better-than-expected performance? As the combat begins, little time is devoted to orienting unless some new information pertaining to the actual identity or intent of the attacker comes into play. Information cascades in real time, and the pilot does not have time to process it consciously; the pilot reacts as he is trained to, and conscious thought is directed to supervising the flow of action and reaction, continuously repeating the OODA cycle.

Simultaneously, the opponent is going through the same cycle. Most of us are under enormous pressure to act quickly, to show that we're doing something and in control, but it's important to stop and think every now and then. Inaction (for orientation purposes) is sometimes more important than quick execution. Decision-making is about more than appearing decisive. It's also about managing the context to achieve an optimal outcome. In any decision-making process, the winner isn't the one who reacts most quickly, but the one who decides how to act most effectively.

Think in years, not days. Use the 10/10/10 rule. "People who overweight the first-order consequences and ignore the effects that the second- and subsequent-order consequences will have on their goals, rarely reach their goals," says Ray Dalio. Every decision has an impact on the next one. Warren Buffett, Charlie Munger and many other known figures swear by the 10/10/10 strategy. Ask yourself the following three questions: How will I feel about it in 10 minutes? How will I feel about it in 10 months? How will I feel about it in 10 years? Most of us are conditioned to respond as quickly as possible in many situations, however, it's vital to consider the long-term consequences of your decisions. Milton Friedman once said, "The best measure of

quality thinking is your ability to predict the consequences of your ideas and subsequent actions.”

Trust your gut “brain”. In the business world, you hear a lot of talk about intuition, “trusting your gut.” It’s less simple than you might think. Professor William Duggan believes that there are three different types of intuition: Ordinary intuition is just a feeling, a gut instinct. Expert intuition is snap judgments, when you instantly recognize something familiar, the way a tennis pro knows where the ball will go from the arc and speed of the opponent’s racket... The third kind, strategic intuition, is not a vague feeling, like ordinary intuition. Strategic intuition is a clear thought... That flash of insight you had last night might solve a problem that’s been on your mind for a month...Expert intuition is always fast, and it only works in familiar situations.

Strategic intuition is always slow, and it works for new situations, which is when you need your best ideas. This difference is crucial, because expert intuition can be the enemy of strategic intuition. As you get better at your job, you recognize patterns that let you solve similar problems faster and faster. That’s expert intuition at work. In new situations your brain takes much longer to make enough new connections to find a good answer. A flash of insight happens in only a moment, but it may take weeks for that moment to come. You can’t rush it. But your expert intuition might see something familiar and make a snap judgment too soon. The discipline of strategic intuition requires you recognize when a situation is new and turn off your expert intuition. You must disconnect the old dots, to let new ones connect on their own. Learn to trust your expert intuition (based on experience) when making choices about familiar problems.

Build a decision-making system. “We don’t always have control over outcomes, but we do have control over our process,” says Amy Summerville, a psychology professor at Miami University. Sometimes you don’t have the luxury of time to extensively consider

all the different scenarios and options. What you need in a situation like that is a solid decision-making model. Medics, boxers, footballers, and firefighters think on their feet. In the heat of the moment, they don't have time for deviating thoughts. The pressure of the moment forces their minds to focus on what needs to be done now. They process information so quickly that "rapid cognition" — decisions that spring from hard thinking based on sound experience — can feel more instinctive than scientific. If they make mistakes, they recover quickly. These are two ways to build a better decision-making system:

1. Understand pattern recognition. Most of what we face each day is similar to other scenarios we have already experienced. By understanding this, it's possible to quickly map a range of previous experiences and their outcomes. Leverage those to arrive at the most viable decision...fast. Over time, as you continue making decisions, your speed and quality will improve.

2. Use the 2 minutes rule. For most decisions, it's much better to pick an option, and just move on, and the two-minute rule can help. Give yourself a timer that helps you focus on the decision rather than having your mind wander and get distracted. If you had two minutes to make a decision, how will you decide? It doesn't even have to be two minutes, necessarily, it just has to be a short amount of time, and you have to force yourself to pick a side by the time it runs out. Use this approach if you suck at making small decisions fast (where to eat, which movie to watch, what to eat for dinner etc.). With the pressure of a time limit, you'll need to get to the heart of the matter faster and collect the pros and cons quickly, which you might not otherwise do.

Key takeaway. The only way you're going to get better at making smart and better decisions is by practicing making decisions every single day. If you start making this part of your daily routine, you may feel more confident in your actions and

decision-making skills. It'll take time and practice, but once you get the hang of it, you will make an informed decision in any situation.

Smartphone Detox: An Antidote to The Age of Brain Drain

In the age of constant connectivity, distraction is at its peak in life and at work. Our minds need urgent purification to improve focus, replenish attention, and encourage creativity. The average adult checks their phone 50 to 300 times each day. And we tap, swipe and click on our devices 2,617 times per day, according to a recent study. We spend more time online than we do asleep. Chris Bailey, author of *Hyperfocus*, writes, "Our smartphones provide an endless stream of bite-sized, delicious information for our brains to consume. It's easy to get hooked, even to feel addicted. And most of us would prefer not to feel this way."

Every time you pull out your phone to scan your feeds, your brain is building a habit loop that reinforces itself to encourage the habit. Notifications prompt task-irrelevant thoughts and disrupt attention performance even if you don't interact with the device. The buzzes, beeps, emails, alerts, and notifications never end until you do something about it. An increasing number of psychologists and doctors are concerned about our relationship with smartphones. "It's a spectrum disorder," says Dr. Anna Lembke, a psychiatrist at Stanford University, who studies addiction. "There are mild, moderate and extreme forms." And for many people, there's no problem at all.

According to David Greenfield, a clinical psychiatrist and founder of the Center for Internet and Technology Addiction, smartphones can easily take over your life, because they're always screaming for attention. Being constantly plugged in affects our sleep patterns, posture and more in our bodies and minds. Our lives are becoming more wired all the time, hence the need to take over and control your relationship with mobile devices before they become the only thing you deeply care about at the expense of your relationships. If you feel your phone is taking over your life, schedule digital detox on your calendar. Start balancing your digital life with real life. "People are always amazed by how different they feel after not being on their phones and that motivates them to want to keep going," says Tanya Goodin, author of *OFF. Your Digital Detox for a Better Life*. Technology is a function of our choices. How and what we consume digitally is largely up to us. Plan your relationship with technology, and make the most of it at the right time.

Pause on purpose. Consider a digital detox every now and then. Digital detox is a nice break from the daily grind of updates, and messages. "You're making your time sacred again — reclaiming it," says Shlain says Tiffany Shlain, a San Francisco Bay Area filmmaker says. "You stop all the noise," she adds. Downtime replenishes the brain's stores of attention and motivation. You need a break from technology to achieve your highest levels of performance at work. Switching off gives you more clarity for creative work. With clarity, comes more time to think and generate new and better ideas. You can start your digital detox by shutting off notifications. Choose to check updates, feeds at a specific time of your choice.

Set a designated time to check in and catch up. "If you establish a maximum daily time allowance for your devices then you will be more likely to stick to your detox," suggests Dr. Richard Graham, a Technology Addiction Specialist at Nightingale Hospital.

This works for me, especially when I am working. I cut off all distractions to focus and work better. “Out of sight, out of mind”. A digital detox is like breaking bad food habits, except instead of shunning bad food, you shun screens. A detox allows you to impose a restriction on your technology use. Unplugging periodically, improves your mental clarity, solidifies your attention, and encourages creativity. While it’s constantly available, you purposefully isolate your interaction by setting a new schedule to control how you use your devices. “Unplugging offers a chance to create “real” connections instead, often figured sentimentally as face-to-face conversations, moments with children or experiences in nature,” writes Megan Ward of The Wall Street Journal. Make time to contemplate on important issues in your life.

Remember your priorities. Technology is meant to improve how we work and make life easier. But smartphones, in particular, are making us less focused. Instead of working on our priorities, we urgently respond to other people’s priorities — our inboxes are full of them. Email addiction is a time-wasting epidemic in the digital age. You probably receive dozens or hundreds of emails every day. But you don’t have to respond to each one of them as and when they hit your inbox. Jocelyn K. Glej, the author of Unsubscribe, says that while checking emails throughout the day may make you feel productive, the opposite is true.

Schedule time to check and respond to your emails. Use the 2-minutes rule when you make time for emails; if it takes less than two minutes, respond instead of marking it as “unread”. It’s easy to forget your own priorities when you spend your day responding to others’ needs. Don’t allow other people’s agenda to rule your work week. In 18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction, and Get the Right Things Done, Peter Bregman writes, “To get the right things done, choosing what to ignore is as important as choosing where to focus.”

Be proactive, not reactive! “Reactive” means, you don’t have the initiative. You let the events set the agenda. You are practically checking things off others’ lists. “Proactive” on the other hand is associated with control. You are in charge. You plan and take the initiative in your direction. It’s a way of dealing with things, that you can develop and strengthen. When you are proactive, you react ahead of time, hence saving you time.

Key takeaway. It is time for a digital detox. Starting today, make a deliberate choice to unplug. Remember, detoxing is a habit. It takes time to build new habits. Don’t aim for a radical change. Plan to unplug, and increase the times you disconnect every week.

Digital detoxing is like exercising an unfamiliar muscle. You need to start small and build up to bigger and bolder moves as your strength and confidence grows.

Battling Tsundoku (Buying Books And Never Reading Them)

Your brain on books is active — growing, changing and making new connections and different patterns, depending on the type of material you’re reading. Roberto Bolaño says, “Reading is like thinking, like praying, like talking to a friend, like expressing your ideas, like listening to other people’s ideas, like listening to music, like looking at the view, like taking a walk on the beach.” Reading is a huge part of my life.

It informs everything I choose to write and share with my audience. Reading not only improves your brain’s connectivity, it also increases attention spans, focus and concentration. If you struggle to focus, reading can improve your attention span.

When you read a book, all of your attention is focused on the story or gaining a better understanding of a particular topic — the rest of the world just falls away, and you can

immerse yourself in every fine detail you're absorbing. Book hoarding is a habit. The desire to buy more books than you can ever read is so universal, there's a Japanese word for it:

Tsundoku! It literally means 'reading pile'. Tsundoku is a combination of several Japanese words, including "tsunde," which means to stack things; "oku," which means to leave for a while; and "doku," which means to read. As the BBC pointed out recently, "'tsundoku' has the meaning of buying reading material and piling it up". Tsundoku dates back to the Japanese Meiji era (1868–1912). The term can be found in print as early as 1879, says Professor Andrew Gerstle, who teaches pre-modern Japanese at the University of London. He says, "the word 'doku' can be used as a verb to mean 'reading'" while the "tsun" originates in "tsumu", meaning "to pile up". While we all appreciate a library of good reads, many readers own more books than they can ever read. A. Edward Newton once said, "Even when reading is impossible, the presence of books acquired produces such an ecstasy that the buying of more books than one can read is nothing less than the soul reaching towards infinity...we cherish books even if unread, their mere presence exudes comfort, their ready access reassurance."

The comfortable feeling of not running out of good reads makes it really difficult to see tsundoku as an issue. Chances are, you feel one of two ways right now: Either you can't possibly believe that Tsundoku is a personal problem, OR, you're facing the sudden realization that you, too, suffer from tsundoku. I am typically reading 2–10 books in parallel. I finish most great books but not all books. If I am reading for urgent information or knowledge about a new topic, I tend to systematically skim to learn better, and faster. I don't read every book cover-to-cover.

Believing you do just sets you up for failure. Nasim Taleb wrote in *The Black Swan*:
Read books are far less valuable than unread ones. The library should contain as much of what you don't know as your financial means, mortgage rates and the currently tight

real-estate market allows you to put it there. You will accumulate more knowledge and more books as you grow older, and the growing number of unread books on the shelves will look at you menacingly. Indeed, the more you know, the larger the rows of unread books. Let us call this collection of unread books an antilibrary. Instead of feeling guilty about books you haven't read, you should see them as an opportunity to upgrade your knowledge, learn a skill, or improve yourself. The good news is, they're available to you if you ever need them. The most important question is: What will you do with all those unread books. Do yourself a favor and commit to reading even a page everyday.

Find a system that works for you. In the age of ebooks, Tsundoku is even more common. I don't read when I am "in the mood" because that's unpredictable. I read everywhere when I have even 5 minutes. It's super convenient to pull out my phone and read a paragraph or two here and there. Use every moment. If you have a commute, use it. If you have a lunch break, use that. Waiting in line? Read. Eliminate one hour of television a day if you have to. The long-term benefits cannot be compared with the short-term pleasure of daily distractions. If you have a tsundoku problem, you have three choices:

1. You can sort through your collection and donate the ones you may never read to people who will savor each word and give them the attention they deserve.
2. If your habit is more about the piles than the books, you can easily organise them better, and get it under control. You could get a better bookshelf and decide how you want to organise them to help you read more everyday.
3. When you go digital, Tsundoku becomes even more difficult to control. Even though collections need not take up a ton of space, you could still hoard hundreds or even thousands of books and magazines without taking over your home. Choose to read with purpose. Are you reading for pleasure, information, facts or you are reading to

understand a topic. Learn speed reading, and choose to ignore extraneous details if you don't need it. It's never too late to start reading again!

Pygmalion Effect: How Expectations Shape Behaviour For Better or Worse

Higher expectations influence performance. Positive reinforcement can lead to good results. Those who expect more, get more. Charles Kettering, once said, "High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation." The opposite is true. Low expectations undermine achievement. Those who expect less, get less. If you expect someone to perform poorly, there is a high probability they won't deliver better results. The Pygmalion effect, also known as the Rosenthal effect, is the phenomenon whereby higher expectations lead to an increase in performance, named after the Ovid tale of a sculptor who falls in love with one of his statues. Robert Rosenthal defined the Pygmalion effect as "the phenomenon whereby one person's expectation for another person's behavior comes to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy" (American Psychologist, Nov. 2003, p. 839).

The work of Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobsen (1968), among others, proved that teacher expectations influence student performance. "When we expect certain behaviors of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behavior more likely to occur." (Rosenthal and Babad, 1985). Rosenthal studied covert communication to prove the Pygmalion Effect: the nonverbal language of vocal tone, facial expressions, posture and gestures that make up the bulk of human expression.

Here is a description of the original study: Students took a test that was said to be able to identify "growth spurters," or those who were poised to make strides academically. Teachers were given the names of pupils who were about to bloom intellectually — and sure enough, these students showed a significantly greater gain in

performance over their classmates when tested again at the end of the year. But here's the thing: the "spurters" were actually chosen at random. The only difference between them and their peers, Rosenthal writes, "was in the mind of the teacher." And yet the expectations held in the mind of the teacher — or the parent, or the manager, or the coach — can make an enormous difference.

Rosenthal proposed four key factors that could help explain how teachers' expectations influence students: They boil down to climate (warm and friendly behavior), input (the tendency for teachers to devote more energy to their special students), output (the way teachers call on those students more often for answers) and feedback (giving generally more helpful responses to the students for whom teachers have the highest hopes). Research conducted since Rosenthal and Jacobson's original study has determined that the Pygmalion effect applies to all kinds of settings, from sports teams to the military to the workplace. Statistics How To explains: The Rosenthal effect, also called the Experimenter Expectancy Effect, is a special case of the Pygmalion effect that pertains to experiments and experimenter bias (Martin & McIntyre, 1994). If a researcher believes that their experiment is likely to result in a particular outcome, that bias will affect how the researcher conducts their work. The results will very likely sway towards the direction the researcher wanted, invalidating any study results.

In the workplace, management expectations of employees can also alter management behaviour, and subsequently affect staff results. If you receive frequent recognition from your boss, you are likely to feel motivated and will tend to achieve an even better performance. On the contrary, if you are continuously questioned and your work is ruthlessly criticized, the quality of your work can suffer. If you expect the best in others, constructive criticism doesn't have to sound like reprobation.

Don't fill the message with negative connotations. Other things like education level, life experiences, relationships with colleagues, and company culture can determine

performance at work but don't underestimate the power of positive reinforcement. As a leader, you should hold positive and high expectations that your team will solve that difficult problem, meet those seemingly insurmountable challenges, and more often than not, they will meet or exceed your expectations. Blaise Pascal, French philosopher and mathematician, said, "Treat a human being as they are, and they will remain the same. Treat them as what they can become, and they will become what they can become."

Excellence can be cultivated and nurtured. When you model life and work this way, you are clearly sending a message to yourself that excellence is the expectation. It can be difficult to deliberately change your expectations of others. But you can consciously change your behavior to bring out the best in your relationships at home, and at work.

The Pygmalion effect is an interpersonal motivational phenomenon. Contrasted with the Pygmalion effect is the negative Golem effect, in which lowering manager expectations impairs subordinate performance. High expectations are too important to be left to chance; they should be built into your relationships to get more and give more. In *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie recommends, "Giving others a great reputation to live up to." Positive reinforcement is a powerful tool. Set high expectations for yourself and others. Challenge yourself with more difficult goals and tasks in an effort to rise to meet the challenge. With positive thoughts and expectations, you look for evidence to support your beliefs, and slowly, your beliefs for yourself and others become reality.

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